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Indian Studies Review is a Multidisciplinary, Formerly UGC-Care listed, Peer-reviewed, academic journal published twice a year (January and July) both online and in print from Delhi. It welcomes original research articles from authors doing research in social sciences and its sub-disciplines. The objective of the journal is to provide platform to the researchers, academicians, policy makers and policy practitioners to engage with issues of contemporary relevance in polity, economy or society and initiate a scholarly intellectual debate through their research monographs. Articles must have a theoretical structure and methodological insight employed in the critical and objective enquiry. Review articles and book reviews are also welcome.

The Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta: A Guideline for Good Governance and Rājadhama

Krishna Murari¹ 

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of good governance from both modern political theory and classical Buddhist thought, focusing especially on the Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta, preserved and collected as one of the suttas (discourses) of the Dīgha Nikāya. It first outlines the features and importance of good governance as articulated by contemporary frameworks, which emphasize the rule of law, transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, inclusivity, and responsiveness. Thereafter, it examines how the Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta presents an ideal model of governance centered on the ruler's moral virtue, public welfare duties, nonviolence, and the supremacy of Dhamma (Sanskrit Dharma, ethical law). Through comparative analysis, the study identifies significant parallels, such as a shared commitment to justice, welfare, and anti-corruption, as well as key differences, notably the Sutta's emphasis on personal virtue over institutional structures and its fusion of secular and spiritual authority. Finally, the paper highlights the continuing relevance of Buddhist governance ideals today, particularly in the context of inclusive development, environmental stewardship, and ethical leadership. The findings suggest that both ancient and modern perspectives agree that governance is not merely about power but the moral responsibility to serve society with compassion, justice, and integrity.

Keywords: Good Governance, Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta, Dhamma, Ethical Leadership, Public Welfare

INTRODUCTION

“Governance” broadly refers to the processes of decision-making and implementation through which a society is managed (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.). Good governance builds on this concept by ensuring that these processes effectively address societal needs while upholding justice and the public good (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.). It is considered fundamental to

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development; in fact, poor governance is often described as a “root cause of all evil” (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.) in society, leading major donors to condition aid on the implementation of governance reforms. In contemporary terms, good governance encompasses principles such as the rule of law, transparency, accountability, broad participation, effectiveness, equity, and responsiveness (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], n.d.). These principles aim to minimize corruption and ensure that institutions serve all segments of society.

Modern Indian political theory and thought extensively deals with the issue of governance. For instance, Ambedkar, who borrows extensively from Buddhist philosophy, believes that true governance transcends power. It is a moral obligation grounded in compassion, justice and unwavering integrity in service to society. He believes that governance should be understood as an ethical commitment to serve society through integrity and compassion. Ambedkar emphasised that governance must secure social justice, dignity and ethical restraints and firmly believed that power exists to serve, not to dominate and policies must aim at reducing suffering and inequality. The idea of governance in Buddhism and in Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s thought shares strong ethical foundations but differs in method and context. Ambedkar consciously reinterpreted Buddhist principles to address modern constitutional governance. Ambedkar adapted Buddhist ethics to a modern constitutional framework. He viewed the Indian Constitution as a modern form of *Dhamma*. Governance must be based on justice, morality, and reason, not religion. Unlike traditional Buddhist kingship, he stressed on state intervention. He believes that governance must destroy caste hierarchies and ensure equality and hence supported affirmative action as moral governance.

Similar traits could be discerned in Buddhism. However, its fundamental concern was not to deal with any political aspects of life but with ‘the existential problems (*dukkha*) of human life and their cessation (*dukkha-nirodha*)’ (Buddha, n.d.). To ameliorate the condition of the people suffering in the world, Buddhism, too, has long articulated ideals of righteous rule apart from other things. In this context, a *sutta* (discourse) of the Buddha, enshrined in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, (Buddha, trans. Bodhi, 2012) the first text of the *Sutta Piṭaka* is noticeable. This *sutta* enumerates the story of a kingdom, highlighting the effects of good and bad governance. Herein, it appears desirable to quote the views of Balkrishna G. Gokhale, who, citing

the Buddhist views, says, “In the very beginning, in the pristine state of humanity, all men were virtuous. Each respected the rights of others and fulfilled his own obligations conscientiously. There was no theft, there was no lying or cheating, and there was no violence. With such idyllic conditions, the state was superfluous as a regulatory agency and hence did not exist. But later, we are told, the standard of human behaviour deteriorated. Untruth, deceit, theft and violence ruled the lives of men as every man's hand was against his fellow beings and might prevailed over right (Gokhale, 1966). It is in this background of the deterioration in human behaviour, a necessity was felt to frame certain guidelines or rules to overcome such situations. Hence, as evident from the perusal of the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*, (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.) the Buddha delivered a discourse, highlighting the duties of a universal monarch (*cakkavatti*) who rules over his kingdom according to *Dhamma* (truth or law), technically termed in Pāli as “*Rājadhmma*” (and “*Rājadharmā* in Sanskrit) (Narayan, n.d., p.16), the application of which in running a government could be much conducive and productive to the progress of the socio-political sphere of a country. This discourse, in fact, depicts how an ideal ruler governs over his kingdom non-violently and justly, following the activities of moral virtue and social welfare (Buddhist kingship, n.d.).

In this background, the present paper aims to explore the concept of good governance in general terms and through the lens of the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*. Hence, the author of the paper intends to present an outline of the standard features and importance of good governance from modern perspectives, vis-à-vis the *Cakkavattisihanāda* by examining how this *sutta* treats the issue of governance, and finally compare traditional ideals, as enshrined in Buddhist literature, with contemporary political theory. Throughout the paper, the emphasis is placed on how Buddhist principles, especially as enumerated in this *sutta*, converge with or differ from modern governance norms.

FEATURES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Modern definitions of good governance converge on several key principles. A United Nations analysis identifies and advocates participation in or inclusive political involvement of citizens as a cornerstone, noting that freedom of association and expression ensures that all voices, especially the vulnerable, can influence decisions (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Likewise, the rule of law is

essential to implement the government's decisions. Fair and impartial legal frameworks, backed by an independent judiciary and police, must protect the rights of citizens and hold all actors accountable for their governing activities (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Closely related is accountability that institutions (both governmental and non-governmental) answer to the public for their actions, which presupposes transparency in governmental decisions and data, related to them must be open and understandable (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

Responsiveness to and effectiveness in governing activities could be taken as additional characteristics of good governance. It serves stakeholders within a reasonable time, and produces results that meet societal needs while using resources wisely and justly (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Good governance is also consensus-oriented, mediating diverse interests to reach broadly acceptable, equitable or inclusive solutions, ensuring that all members, particularly minorities and the disadvantaged, feel they have a stake in society (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). In short, a well-governed society enables collective decision-making that is open, just, and geared toward the common good (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

For example, an authoritative UNESCAP report concludes that good governance “assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account, and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making.” It also explicitly lists eight major attributes, namely, participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and subject to the rule of law (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

Similarly, the World Bank emphasizes that good governance involves the proper use of power to regulate a country's economic and social resources for development, explicitly aiming to reduce corruption, include minority interests, and meet community needs (Good Governance: Definition and characteristics, 2021). Across these frameworks, the emphasis is on *procedural norms*, such as open processes and checks on authority, and ethical outcomes like justice, fairness, and security for all, at least the weaker and needy sections.

IMPORTANCE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

These days, good governance is widely recognized as a useful tool in both development practice and political theory. Societies with a high quality of good governance tend to experience better economic performance, poverty reduction, and social stability. Contrary to this, poor governance, marked by corruption, arbitrariness, and exclusion, is seen as a root cause of the society's conflict, underdevelopment, and moral decay (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). This is why, now, as one UN document notes, major donors and international organisations often tie financial aid to make reforms that promote good governance (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). Underlining this aspect of good governance, when we assess the Cakkavattisihanāda *sutta*, we reach to address a meaningful, golden and universal principle that poverty is the root cause of all evils, leading to spiritual and moral degeneration in society. This *sutta* further emphasises that a regeneration of the nation and society is not possible without liquidating poverty (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, pp.52-54).

At its core, good governance underpins the realisation of rights and the public interest. Public institutions are expected to conduct their affairs and manage resources without any abuse or corruption as a component of good governance. This aspect of the good governance guarantees the realisation of and respect for human rights (Good governance, n.d.). This implies that, in practice, the governments govern to serve the interests of the many, not only of a privileged few. This shows that good governance aims to minimise corruption, care for all, protect minorities, and listen to the marginalised (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). A transparent and accountable government is more likely to instil confidence among citizens to trust it and invest in the future. Enforcement of rules by the government impartially is one of the basic components of good governance, as it engenders a stable environment for commerce, education, and innovation. Contrary to this, when governance is poor or broken down, people lose faith in the institutions, undermining development and social cohesion.

Moreover, many scholars link good governance to the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, they believe an effective, inclusive government can better deliver public services, protect the environment, and adapt to future challenges. In short, in the light of the discussion mentioned

earlier, it could be said that good governance is not only a desirable abstract ideal, but a practical precondition for the well-being of a society. It is the “ideal towards which” states should strive, recognising that few attain perfection, but all benefit from moving in its direction (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009).

GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE *CAKKAVATTISĪHANĀDA SUTTA*

The *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*, rendered in English as “The Lion’s Roar of the Wheel-turner”, gives a detailed account of the Buddhist mythological conception of a *Cakkavatti* king, which had been a common heritage of all the traditions of Indian culture (Walshe, 1995, p.xx). It depicts the issues of good governance in the form of the duties of an ideal king, called “*Rājadhama*”. In this discourse, the Buddha describes a mythical age of prosperity of a kingdom under a universal monarch (*cakkavatti*) that undergoes the age of moral decline, and then enunciates the “noble code” of the wheel-turner king’s duties (DN 26.2; Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). Contrary to the modern concept of good governance, which focuses on institutions, the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* emphasises the moral character and responsibilities of the ruler himself. For example, it begins by declaring that the supremacy of the *Dhamma*, i.e., cosmic law and moral truth, must prevail above all (DN 26.2; Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). A virtuous king rules over the kingdom being “*Dharma-centred*” and known as *dhammika* (just), as his authority is legitimised because he upholds *dharma*, not because of taking birth in a king’s house (DN 26.2; Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59).

The Pāli texts prescribe certain duties of a king, known as “*Rājadhama*”. The concept of “*Rājadhama*”, which played a significant role in Indian Political thought, is viewed and interpreted differently. Outside Buddhism, it was used in the sense ‘strategies used by kings to gain their goals irrespective of morality or immorality.’ Further, it had been used in the sense of the ‘duty of kings to protect the caste system’ (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). However, in the Buddhist tradition, the term ‘*rājadhama/rājadhama*’ refers to the moral practices to be followed by rulers (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). This ‘*rājadhama*’ consists of ten (10) royal duties, called “*Dasa-rājadhama*” about which Sara Shaw observes, “The ten *dhammas* are not the same as the ten perfections acquired over many lifetimes, the necessary commitments of a *bodhisatta* vow. Rather, they represent a worldly, or we could say even secular, counterpart to the ten qualities that mark a *bodhisatta*, within the

world of politics and state” (Shaw, 2017, p.99). It is remarkable to mention, here, that Pāli Nikāyas do not make a detailed analysis of the ten duties of the king; rather, it is the Jataka literature (Jātaka, IV, p. 176, V, p.377), which frequently makes references to the ten duties of a king.

Since the executive powers of a state were, generally, vested in a king in Ancient India, his behaviour and attitude in relation to governance were very crucial. To prevent the possibility of a king (i.e., ruler) turning out to be a tyrant, the ruler was brought under the control of *dharmā* and was time and again trained to act in consonance with moral virtues, enshrined in the code of *dharmā*. Aligning almost with this tradition, Buddhism also prescribed moral teaching for a king, which could be taken as “Ten royal virtues” that must be followed by a king to govern the state. It was expected that a ruler, while ruling over his kingdom or state, would in no way violate the ten royal duties (Jātaka I, pp. 260, 399, III, p.274).

The ten qualities of a virtuous king may be enumerated as under:

- i *Dāna* (generosity or charity),
- ii *Sīla* (morality or virtue)
- iii *Pariccāga* (sacrifices)
- iv *Ajjava* (honesty or integrity)
- v *Maddava* (Kindness)
- vi *Tapa* (Restraint of senses or austerity in habits)
- vii *Akkodha* (absence of anger)
- viii *Avihimsā* (non-violence)
- ix *Khanti* (patience) and
- x *Avirodha* (absence of contradiction or opposition).

To understand these virtuous qualities of a king better in the context of good governance, the explanation of each of these qualities appears essential to mention here.

Dāna: The term ‘*dāna*’, though, refers to the practice of donating to someone. It is a highly appreciated practice in Buddhism to develop detachment from worldly possessions, the fulfilment of which creates different kinds of problems in human life. Buddhism lists *dāna* (generosity) as the first practice among the lists of ethical conduct. Even the path of a *bodhisatta* (*future Buddha*) begins with *dāna*. This practice heads the different sets of

meritorious deeds, making it clearer that generosity is the central point of ethical practice in Buddhism. So far as the practice of *Dāna* by a ruler/king is concerned, it enjoins upon the king to be generous enough while governing the state to provide the poor people with what is necessary for them. In the modern context, it inspires the government to render welfare services to the people. The lack of such services could result in poverty and, finally, social distress. This aspect of the '*dāna*' could be vividly assessed from the perusal of the Cakkavattisihanāda-sutta (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98).

***Sīla*:** *Sīla*, generally translated as virtue or morality, refers to a group of commandments not to be followed by an individual who wants to live happily and peacefully in society without creating problems for others. The practice of *sīla* is considered essential for both laypeople and monastics to proceed on the spiritual path, leading to the welfare and happiness of people in particular and society in general. Without the practice of morality, which results in physical and vocal purifications, the progress on the spiritual path, which leads to the development of wisdom, is not possible. "Essentially, *sīla* means sense restraint-everyone must guard their senses. This is achieved by following precepts without any breach. Typically, laypeople from all walks of life-royalty, administrators, merchants, and householders - observe the five precepts in their daily lives" (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). Kings in Buddhist literature are shown to uphold the five precepts (*pañcasīla*) in ordinary conditions and even observe *uposatha* on special occasions. Although rulers are vested with power, they are not expected to misuse it. Morality in Buddhism provides practitioners with a blameless conscience (Pannaloka, 2024, p.92). Some kings are depicted as being willing to give up their lives to preserve morality (Sīlavīmamsana Jātaka, n.d.). Even more strikingly, the *sīla* upheld by the universal monarch includes the five precepts (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995).

***Pariccāga*:** The term '*pariccāga*' is rendered into English as 'giving up, liberality and sacrifice' (Davids & Stede, 1925, p.424). Technically, it refers to "complete giving up something, by someone, to the needy" in order to ensure their welfare or well-being. This practice enjoins upon a ruler that he must sacrifice his comforts for the well-being of his/her citizens (Davids & Stede, 1925, p.98).

***Ajjava*:** The term '*ajjava*', rendered as sinlessness, refers to the quality of uprightness or straightforwardness. It signifies adherence to what is right and acting accordingly without being biased by favouritism, anger, fear, or

ignorance. Since decision-making is an integral part of the governing process, the practice of *ajjava* enjoins upon a ruler to make decisions with proper consideration without adopting any partial outlook towards anyone on the basis of caste, creed, gender etc. A ruler should not shy away taking upright decisions, even if, he has apprehension of losing his life and affecting the entire country.

Maddava: The term '*maddava*', rendered as 'softness' or 'gentleness' in a way, refers to the mind full of loving-kindness (*metta-citta*) (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98). Such a mind enables a ruler to behave with friendliness with his subordinates and subjects in order to establish a trustworthy and better relationship. Such an attitude of a ruler could be seen as quite opposed to a dictatorial or tyrannical rule. It guides a ruler to take care of the welfare of his subjects compassionately, ensuring their fair treatment, regardless of caste, class, or gender. With this attitude, a ruler or leader upholds *dharma* (righteousness) and does not allow personal bias to interfere in administration.

Tapa: Tapa refers to 'austere practice' enjoins upon a ruler to lead a life with strict sense-restraint like ascetics (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98). Generally, it involves voluntary acceptance of hardships for spiritual growth, self-purification, and moral upliftment. However, its relevance extends beyond personal spirituality; it has a societal and ethical dimension, particularly in leadership and governance. Consequently, a life given to self-indulgence at the expense of the worries of ordinary citizens is not the practice of leaders with integrity (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98).

Akkodha: The term '*akkodha*' refers to a state of 'no-anger' which is opposite to '*kodha*', anger. It encourages a ruler to hold no grudges, animosities and revengeful activities against their subjects for any reason whatsoever. In a modern sense, it enjoins upon a ruler to refrain from any 'political victimisation'. This means that the rulers cannot exercise anger against any segment of the country, either against the direct competitors or the general public (Pannaloka, 2024, p.98). Rather, it ensures a ruler makes policies based on reason, justice, and long-term public interest rather than personal vendettas or emotions.

Avihimsā: *Avihimsā*, which means non-violence, is a highly emphasised moral value in the Indian tradition. It refers to the practice of refraining from causing physical, emotional, or psychological harm to any living being. It implies compassion, empathy, tolerance, and respect for life. Past experiences

as well as present experiences, as evident from the perusal of history, show that a ruler adopted violent means to achieve his ends of the state. On the contrary, in the context of good governance, *avihimsā* plays a crucial role by shaping a humane, just, and peaceful society. It is in consonance with one of the Buddhist royal duties that enjoins upon a ruler to avoid violence against the people. Non-violence, in fact, ensures that conflicts or any armed struggle should be resolved through dialogue and understanding rather than force. It is so because non-violent thinking begets a non-violent course of action. Underlining this aspect of violence and non-violence, a noted Pāli text, the Dhammapada, says, “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal life” (Dhammapada, Verse 5; Buddha, n.d.). Non-violence, in fact, supports policies that never exploit people or the environment. Good governance under this principle seeks long-term welfare over short-term gains by respecting freedom of speech, protest, and dissent, and enabling participatory decision-making, empowering citizens without coercion. In this regard, the examples of Asoka the Great and Mahatma Gandhi could be cited here, who followed the policy of non-violence to achieve their ends.

Khanti: *Khanti*, which means patience or endurance or tolerance, encourages a ruler to face difficulties that arise in the process of governing the state. It implies enduring hardship, criticism, or provocation without anger or retaliation. It is not passive submission but rather a conscious, mindful restraint that arises from understanding and compassion. A ruler who practices patience fosters peace, fairness, and justice, all of which are vital to a well-functioning and compassionate society. It is worth noting that the process of making decisions and implementing them requires a lot of patience. In a democratic system, these days, the ruling party tries to suppress its opponent political parties by force or illegal means, considering them as their enemies. This attitude of the ruling political party goes against the essence of the *rājadharmas*, the guiding principle of the state (Pannaloka, 2024, p.100).

Avirodhatā: *Avirodhatā*, which means absence of opposition, may be interpreted as amity, friendship, benevolence or refraining from revengefulness. In the context of governance, it implies the absence of internal contradiction and the harmonious alignment of principles, policies, and actions. It enables consistency in policies, leads to predictable governance, fosters trust among citizens and institutions, and ensures that laws are applied uniformly, avoiding

arbitrary or contradictory rulings. It promotes the cultivation of amity in society. A government that upholds this principle demonstrates integrity and earns the trust of its people. In a world of increasing complexity and pluralism, *Avirodhatā* serves as a guiding light for coherent policy-making and responsible leadership.

The picture that we may draw from the above description is that the Buddhist policy of governance should be based on moral ideals, directed to adopt economic and political principles that ensure the welfare and happiness of the people. The latter four qualities emphasize the demand to stick to a compassionate approach to governance (Pannaloka, 2024, p.97).

In this background, it is clear that apart from other things, the wheel-turner (*cakkavatti*) must provide *care, shelter, and protection*, regarded as a holy triplet *dharma*, for every class in society. The text explicitly lists welfare obligations to his own household, the army, his nobles and civil servants, regional governors, the learned and prosperous, city-dwellers and villagers, monks and brahmins, and even animals and nature (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In each case, the ruler is to ensure *justice and safety* for those under his domain. For instance, he is urged “not to conduct himself unjustly” toward conquered peoples and “to provide the poor whom you have conquered with financial support” (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). Similarly, the king must even guard the natural order: one duty is “providing just care, shelter and guard for living beings and nature or the environment” (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). This wide-ranging welfare mandate anticipates modern notions of social safety nets and environmental stewardship.

In addition to material welfare, the king must maintain high moral standards. He is admonished never to act “against the *Dharma*,” i.e. he should not be unjust or immoral in discharging his duty as a head of the state (kingdom) (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In order to do this, he must consult wise and virtuous advisors for guidance in upholding these ideals (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In Buddhist terms, *Dharma* itself is considered the “king of kings”. So, the ruler subordinates himself to the principles of truth and righteousness (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). The *Sutta*, in fact, explicitly states that universal kingship is not hereditary. One becomes a universal monarch through the merit of one’s conduct, not by birth (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). In short, the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* envisions a ruler whose power is legitimised over his citizens and kingdom only by upholding his ethical law and duty.

These duties can be summarized as a code of good governance: protect all classes, live by *dharma*, provide public welfare, consult the wise, and embody virtues. Buddhism thus blends legalistic and moralistic models, the “rule of law” in this *sutta* as the rule of *Dharma*, and the king’s role is to be its guardian. Significantly, the *sutta* extends governance to spiritual and ecological realms by caring for monasteries and the natural world (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). The king is described as *raja-dharma* personified as the ideal monarch, presenting himself as a model of the ten virtues of kingship (generosity, virtue, honesty, kind restraint, non-anger, non-violence, patience, etc.) (Buddha, trans. Walshe, 1995, p.59). Thus, the *Cakkavattisihanāda* enumerates an ancient list of wisdom to govern a state, “featuring the good qualities of governance”, centred on compassion, justice, and *dharma* rather than on bureaucracy or winning elections by the majority of citizens’ votes.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH MODERN POLITICAL THEORIES

When we compare this Buddhist view to modern political theories, both parallels and contrasts emerge. However, many features discussed therein overlap with each other. For instance, the Sutta’s emphasis on justice and protection for all citizens resonates with the modern liberal-democratic idea that government must serve the common interest and safeguard rights (UCLG ASPAC, 2021). Its care for the poor and marginalised mirrors contemporary social welfare ideals. It’s a call for non-violence and honesty that aligns with anti-corruption and peacebuilding norms. In both paradigms, accountability and the rule of law (civil law or *dharma*) are foundations of stability.

However, significant differences are also evident. The *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* assumes an absolute monarch endowed with supreme authority, whereas modern theories (especially democratic theory) assume power derives from the people or the constitution. Where the *Sutta* places moral virtue above institutional form, contemporary governance models often stress institutions and procedures over individual morality. For example, liberal democracy emphasises the separation of powers, free elections, and individual rights, trusting that collective institutions will yield fair outcomes. In fact, Buddhism’s concept of *cakkavatti* as a “king who rules righteously and non-violently” parallels classic notions of an ideal leader (cf. the Mandate of Heaven in Confucian thought) (Buddhist kingship, n.d.).

Notably, the *Sutta* depicts the *cakkavatti* king (wheel-turner) as supra-political in one sense. He is simultaneously a secular ruler and spiritual protector, since *Dharma* is his law and “banner” (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). This blurs the line between church and state; indeed, in traditional Buddhist kingdoms, the king was often the head of the religious order as well as the state (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). Modern governance, by contrast, usually separates religion and state. Thus, while democracy prides itself on pluralism and legal-rational authority, the Buddhist view glorifies moral authority and social unity under a righteous leader.

Another contrast is the basis of legitimacy. The *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* explicitly rejects hereditary rule without merit (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). It shares a feature with many modern views but posits merit in a Buddhist sense, highlighting the spiritual worth and virtuous conduct as the ultimate qualification. Modern political legitimacy, however, rests on constitutional law (constitution) and consent of the democratically elected representative rather than personal moral merit. In practice, modern rulers are expected to follow impersonal laws and norms (rule of law, human rights), whereas the Buddhist ideal is a ruler who embodies those norms.

Despite these differences, important bridges exist between the two. Both modern theorists and Buddhist texts acknowledge that unsound and corrupt leadership leads to societal decline. The *Sutta's* narrative of moral decay echoes warnings by political philosophers that tyranny or corrupt rule erode civilization and its legacy. Likewise, the *Sutta's* remedial advocacy for justice, charity, and wise counselling has analogues in modern good-governance prescriptions for fighting corruption, social support programs, and civil society dialogue (UCLG ASPAC, 2021). Although the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* comes from a pre-modern, monarchic context, its core vision that rulers must be benevolent, just, and welfare-minded is fully compatible with contemporary ideals of responsible leadership and public service.

RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The ideals of good governance expressed in the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* appear remarkably useful, valuable and pertinent even today, as the principles of governance, enshrined in this *sutta*, resonate also in the modern democratic frame of government and developmental process, beyond traditional monarchies. The *sutta's* call to protect all members of society (nobles, commoners, clergy, even animals and nature) is a brilliant example

that directly illustrates to today's emphasis on inclusive and sustainable development (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). Its injunction to care for the poor, farmers, merchants and other vulnerable groups anticipates contemporary social safety nets; its decree that the ruler consult wise advisors foreshadows modern practices of having expert councils and anti-corruption agencies by the head of the government.

The *sutta's* ethical lessons even have the potential to inspire secular leaders. "The ten virtues of a king, namely, generosity, morality, honesty, kindness, austerity, patience, non-anger, non-violence, etc, are listed in this Sutta" (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). These are the universal values that can be applied anytime, anywhere in the world to run a just and welfare government. Modern experts on good governance, in fact, stress today the need to adopt and apply similar qualities as hallmarks of good leadership. These qualities promote and inculcate integrity, responsiveness, and stewardship in good leadership. The Buddha's broad concern for mandating all welfare, extending even to wildlife ("animals and birds"), (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.) reflects global concerns like animal rights and ecological protection.

In sum, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda* provides a timeless guideline or format for good governance, prioritising the importance of ethical conduct for those who run the government. It underscores that values matter in politics: an honest, compassionate government will benefit society just as much as well-designed institutions. Today's discussions concerning governance often invoke the need for transparency and the rule of law; the *sutta* reminds us that these require virtuous actors to operate effectively. As development agencies and civil society worldwide push for more accountable, inclusive governments, they echo the ancient Buddhist vision that rulers must be selfless caretakers of the whole community, upholding *Dharma* as the highest law.

CONCLUSION

Good governance, discussed, whether in traditional Buddhist literary terms or modern political theory, ultimately relates to the concerns of government *servicing the people* wisely and justly. Contemporary definitions highlight democratic participation, institutional accountability, the rule of law, and equitable inclusion as key features (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009). On the other hand, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta*, couched in the language of kingship, encapsulates

many of the same principles through a Buddhist lens: a ruler must be virtuous, provide basic requirements for every class, make effort for the protection and welfare of all including the poorest and the environment, and govern the state under the supremacy of *Dharma* (DN 26; Buddha, n.d.). The striking parallel between the modern concept of good governance and Buddhist ideals of good governance is that both traditions prefer to see governance not as mere power, but as a moral responsibility for the welfare of society.

By comparing these perspectives, it may be said that ethical leadership is as essential as institutional design. A modern democracy without integrity is as vulnerable as a monarchy without compassionate responsibility. Conversely, the *sutta's* emphasis on care for all, accountability to wise counsel, and protection of the weak offers a corrective measure to any system that neglects human dignity. In the contemporary world, which faces and witnesses numerous episodes of corruption, inequality, and environmental crisis, the application of the ancient tenets of *Dharma*-based governance appears quite useful, valuable and relevant. The enduring lesson is that good governance is good *Dharma*: a society flourishes when its leaders rule with righteousness, compassion, and inclusiveness, just as the Buddha taught in the *Lion's Roar* discourse.

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Strengthening Democracy and Inclusive Governance in Jammu and Kashmir after Abrogation of Article 370 and 35A

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to critically assess how the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A would affect democracy, inclusive government and security in Jammu and Kashmir. The study considers a mixed-method research design, which involves the combination of qualitative analysis of the provisions of the constitution, judicial courts cases, policy documents and governance reforms. It is also based on quantitative analysis of electoral participation, security indicators and governance outcomes through the use of official sources of data. The results show that post-abrogation has been characterized by a massive structural transformation. It includes administrative decentralization, growth of Panchayati Raj Institutions, and greater participation in grassroots politics as well as a decrease in the level of violence and unrest at a large scale which is measurable. On the whole, the research paper concludes that the constitutional reforms, although providing the conditions that facilitated the process of democratic deepening and inclusive governance. It is also remarkable that inclusive developments have not been as successful in the long-run unless the restoration of representative institutions, attention to accountability, and balancing the security needs with the civil freedoms.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir, Article 370, democracy, inclusive governance, decentralization, security, militancy, political reform

INTRODUCTION

The abrogation of Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution in August 2019 fundamentally changed the political, social, and economic position of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) (G. Nair, 2019). The central

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government argues that abrogation eliminates the special constitutional status of J&K, integrating the state into the Union of India and furthering political efforts to enhance democratic process, promote inclusive governance, and improve socio-economic development. In the era following the abrogation of Article 370, governance in J&K is undergoing major structural transformations. In the post-abrogation process, the state is now bifurcated into two Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir, with a legislative assembly, and this decentralization captures the federal approach in India. The post-abrogation governance structures centralize the locus of power and authority, but promise heightened transparency, accountability, and delivery of public goods (Mohsin, & Muzaffar, 2024). 35A which restricted property and employment rights to permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir, has now been removed as a means of expanding access and opportunity for marginalized groups and claims of increased integration with the rest of India. All of these institutional changes are premised on strengthening democratic participation as the equal protection of law, equal availability of resources, and equal treatment of common fundamental rights are provided to all citizens of the Union Territories (Chauhan, 2022).

Democracy in J&K, both prior to and subsequent to abrogation, has been influenced by a history of conflict, insurgency, and external interference. For years, elections in the region have been reduced to either being boycotted, in some instances violently prevented from happening or politically manipulated, bureaucratically captured, or community constrained; and the democratic system is not seen as a credible system of governance (Ahanger, & Yaqoob, 2023). Article 370, whilst aimed at protecting autonomy, has entrenched a practice of political isolation, and layers of governance dependent on patronage and networks. Its abrogation signals the Indian state on to the road of mainstreaming J&K into national democratic normativity, where political parties, civil rights groups, and everyday citizens could engage in participatory democracies. The challenge going ahead is to convert constitutional nearly uniformity into realities of democratic practice, where there is increasing voter turnout, that representative institutions regain credibility, and competing communities – Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Gujjars, Bakarwals, Pandits and others – feel equally involved in the political process. Thus, strengthening democracy in the region is not only relying to elections, but rather the fielding of public trust, the rule of law and inclusive participation (Sharma, 2024).

Inclusive governance as a normative principle advocates equity, participation, accountability, and responsiveness in policy making and implementation (Hämäläinen, & Salminen, 2025). In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the hope for inclusive governance has been historically compromised because of the enduring presence of structural inequalities, ethnic differences, and a security-oriented policy agenda (Kuszevska, 2022). The constitutional amendments of Article 370 and 35A in 2019 reflect a remarkable change in the constitution that has wide constitutional ramifications on democracy and inclusive governance in Jammu and Kashmir. Although, it is meant to encourage integration, homogenous rights, and administrative efficiency, its democratic success is pegged on the restoration of representative institutions and enhancement of participatory governance and accountability. An area in which social and regional disparity is evident needs policies that touch on historic marginalization and ensure equal development. The reconstruction of public trust and attainment of sustainable democratic consolidation in the post-abrogation era requires empowering of the institutions in the grassroots, credible elections, balancing issues of governance with security issues (Duschinski, Bhan & Robinson, 2023).

The security dimension of governance in J&K continues to be preeminent. The abrogation of Article 370 applies its own version of legitimacy based in some part on the idea that removing the separate political status of J&K from India would discourage militancy, limit cross-border infiltration, and provide a ground for conditions that would foster peace and stability in the region (Bhatia, 2021). The government argues that democratic functioning is incompatible with violence, and moreover that security and development are prerequisites for inclusive governance. In practice today, the security climate has provided mixed results: there have been fewer large-scale organized protests and instances of stone-throwing, yet sporadic militant attacks have still emerged, and there remain trust deficits with the population in the region. Counterinsurgency measures to bolster security in J&K must balance imperatives of security with the real value of civil liberties within their obligations for human rights, as well as to help achieve an environment that fosters debate and dissent that should be part and parcel of democratic governance (Deva, 2020).

Constitutional Evolution and Judicial Interpretation of Articles 370 and 35A

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was a transitional provision on special status and acknowledgment of the unique historical and political

situation of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India in 1947. The provision limits the legislative authority of the Parliament of India to matters of defense, foreign relations, and communication unless the state government agrees to extend this legislative competence (Balcerowicz, 2022). 35A was inserted later via the Presidential Order of 1954, which allows for the J&K legislature to define permanent residents and these residents can possess special privileges in terms of property ownership, public employment, and social welfare. Together these provisions constitute a framework of asymmetrical federalism creating an exception to the principle of constitutional uniformity that applies to the other Indian states. The judiciary has provided a vital role in determining the contextual meaning of these Articles (Duschinski, & Ghosh, 2017).

In *Prem Nath Kaul v. State of J&K* (1959), the Supreme Court stated that Article 370 continued to operate subject to the decisions of the J&K Constituent Assembly meaning it was a temporary feature. Yet in *Sampat Prakash v. State of J&K* (1969), the court stated that after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, Article 370 continued to operate and created the impression of permanence. Likewise in *Mohd. Maqbool Damnoo v. State of J&K* (1972), the court explained how the President may replace references to the *Sadar-i-Riyasat* with the Governor, reinforcing the expansive range of constitutional flexibility in meaning under Article 370 (G. Nair, 2019).

Security Imperatives, Stability, and the Democratic Process

The relationship between security and democracy in Jammu and Kashmir remains a key part of understanding post-abrogation governance. The decades-long armed insurgency, cross-border terrorism, and internal militancy have continuously chipped away at the legitimacy of democratic institutions. High abstentions, more pronounced boycotts, and targeted killings of political activists from non-separatist ideologies result in weak political participation at the village level. The nexus of violence and separatist narratives fills the resulting governance vacuum. Under these conditions, the Indian state argued that security is the foundation of a democratic state; the state is required to first provide security in order for democratic confidence to be restored (Ahanger, & Yaqoob, 2023). The Juridical establishment repeatedly emphasizes the tenuous balance between the individual's liberties and national security of Jammu and Kashmiri. In *Prem Nath Kaul v. State of J&K* (1959), the Supreme Court infers that Article 370 was transitional and contingent

upon J&K Constituent Assembly's will, which implies that it could never be absolute. This obiter strengthens the legal rationale for abrogation where security necessities merge with democratic reconstitution. In *Mohd. Maqbool Damnoo v. State of J&K* (1972), the Court held that the President was empowered to act under Article 370 and to issue orders, including matters of security, after consultation with the Governor, still obliquely asserting the role of the Constitution of India in preserving stability of the region (Deva, 2020).

The trajectory of security challenges in J&K is marked by high-profile terror incidents that expose the fragile link between governance and public order in the Valley. The 2001 attack on the J&K Legislative Assembly, carried out by Jaish-e-Mohammed militants, directly targeted the symbol of democratic authority, killing over 30 people and signaling that democratic institutions themselves were under siege. Similarly, the 2008 Amarnath land row protests reveal how administrative decisions can ignite large-scale unrest when amplified by separatist mobilization, undermining both security and governance. The 2016 Uri attack, where militants stormed an army brigade headquarters and killed 19 soldiers, underscores the vulnerability of security infrastructure and its impact on public morale. Most consequentially, the 2019 Pulwama attack, killed 40 CRPF personnel in one of the deadliest terror strikes on Indian soil, accelerates demands for a fundamental rethinking of J&K's political arrangement. These incidents highlight that militancy in the Valley is not just a law-and-order issue but a systemic challenge that intertwines with questions of democratic legitimacy. The government frames the abrogation of Article 370 as part of a national security doctrine, asserting that exceptional constitutional status provides separatists a political justification that weakens both stability and democratic processes. After abrogation, security agencies report a decline in stone-pelting, protests, and shutdowns, creating conditions for greater civic engagement without militant coercion. Yet, targeted killings of elected representatives, grassroots workers, and minorities persist, showing the difficulty of embedding democracy in a conflict-scarred society. These dynamics highlight the inseparable link between security and democracy: without peace and protection for civic actors, governance lacks legitimacy, and without inclusive institutions, security gains remain fragile (Khan, 2024).

The objective of this study is to critically analyse the political, social, and governance changes in Jammu and Kashmir after the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A. It will explore how altering the region's special constitutional status

has impacted democratic engagement and participation, decentralization, and integration into and across the Indian Union. The study is also assessing the potential for a form of more inclusive governance or governance; as such, it will also analyse equity, participation and accountability in the context of governance, and consider what the relevant implications are for marginalized groups such as women, Scheduled Tribes, and/or non-permanent residents. This research will also look at the changing security environment and how this relates to democratic legitimacy, peace, and development. By connecting the political, governance and security elements together, this study will provide an account of whether the constitutional and institutional changes have led to either a deepening of democracy, a more inclusive form of governance, and/or more stable forms of governance.

This study contributes to the discourse on post-abrogation Jammu and Kashmir by providing a thorough investigation into how political, security and governance institutions are changing since the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A. The work highlights a shift from the region's political isolationist status to political mainstreaming efforts, whereby democratization is re-oriented through the lens of decentralization (i.e., Union Territory governance and Panchayati Raj Institutions), and the newly created local participatory structures. The study takes the additional step towards our knowledge of inclusive governance by analyzing how new legal frameworks, the matter of property rights, and reservation policy affect the historically marginalized communities (i.e., women, Scheduled Tribes, and non-permanent residents). The study provides further insight because it connects the issues of security with democratization and builds on our understanding of stability and peace as preconditions for democratic legitimacy.

The paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 comprises the introduction of the document. A review of literature is comprised under section 2 of the paper. A research methodology is examined in Section 3. The results are discussed in Section 4. The discussion has been provided in detail in section 5. Section 6 contains conclusions, implication, limitation and future scope.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Centralized Decentralization: The Paradox of Administered Political Integration

A major theme of the literature is the Union government's implementation of administrative decentralization as the principal vehicle for political

integration, which scholars termed centralized decentralization (Hajong, Shoeb, Parvez, Verma & Jha, 2022). Moreover (Seelarbokus, 2024) studied the policy was characterized by the direct administration of the region by the central government with the implementation of reforms devolving power to the local level claiming to establish a more direct process of connection between New Delhi, and the people on the ground. As a result, (Kannabiran, K. 2024) explored the period following the abrogation until the implementation of the policy has been full of governance reforms, including the operation of various local governance reforms such as the implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which empowered the local bodies by implementing Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Moreover, the literature has considerable tensions regarding the consequences of this administered integration for the prospects of authentic electoral democracy and political representation. The delay in assembly elections despite a successful District Development Council (DDC) election held in 2020 is highlighted as a major issue of fraught ambiguity, producing an outcome in which local governance exists without higher-level political accountability (Bhat, Ganayee & Jahangir, 2024). Similarly, Hussain, S. (2020) studied the central government describes the high rate of participation in DDC elections as either an endorsement of state policy or an indicator of political normality, many scholars assert that while such elections are meaningful, they do not equate to and are not a substitute for restoring full statehood and representative democracy at the level of the union territory. At last, the academic literature generally asserts that the promised political transformation is incomplete in light of national promises made to provide political representation and accountability, because without restoration of a democratically elected state government there remains a sceptical view of the core components of decentralization and reform (Ali, 2022).

Jammu and Kashmir Security: Armed Forces' Role Before and After Article 370

A significant amount of literature suggests that the pre-abrogation security environment in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) typically represented a military-led Counter-Insurgency (COIN) campaign, characterized primarily by the state-sponsored massive deployment of central armed police forces and the Indian Army with a legal framework such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) to give them broad powers to conduct operations

(Bhattacharyya, 2018). Moreover, the security forces' role was inextricably tied to population-based operations to end a popular militancy. This typically involved the security forces maintaining a permanent presence in urban and rural areas, conducting cordon-and-search operations, and engaging with local communities for long periods of engagements, which may increase stability but also allowed the security forces humanitarian action to be easily conflated with military action, which frequently resulted in human rights abuses and hyper-alienated the population (Chopra, 2019). As such, the pre-2019 period constituted a complicated and sometimes adversarial relationship between security forces and civilians (Arora & Grover, 2019).

Before the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019, Jammu and Kashmir underwent unique security dynamics defined by active militancy, episodic protests, and local insurgency. The region experienced high-profile attacks such as the 2016 Uri attacks and the 2019 Pulwama bombings, illustrating an active threat by organized militant groups (Tanveer, 2025). Furthermore (Jain, 2023) stated the Indian Army employed two emergent counter-insurgency operations, Operation Rakshak and Operation Calm Down, that represented a change in interest from mere display of force to ranged and individual counter-insurgency protection methods. Additionally, Sonpar, S. (2014) investigated the various forces supported counter-insurgency operations including the Special Operations Group (SOG), which was an elite police force that fought the anti-insurgency work at the front operationally by conducting numerous joint operation missions including the elimination of significant militant leaders. In this phase of Jammu and Kashmir's security dynamics, the defined insurgents needed to recruit men locally and soldier deployed personnel increased back to a pre-2014 deployment.

Governance, Inclusion, and Accountability in Post-Abrogation Jammu and Kashmir

The central government's governance model to promote integration through development and direct rule in post-abrogation Jammu and Kashmir is portrayed as an overt purpose to foster inclusion. The study contended that all communities benefited from the new land laws and the fast-tracked infrastructure development programs (Seelarbokus, 2024). However, (Mitra, 2012) studied a central tenet of critical situation argues that the inclusionary mechanics have done the opposite of inclusion. The centralization of decision-

making power and the onboarding of existing geo-spatial dynamics of land use and land ownership in the region, are put forth as aggravating political alienation and social exclusion among the local populations, especially the local Muslim majority, exposing the disparity between policy intent and on-the-ground reality.

Furthermore, the government has encouraged the use of digital governance platforms and the direct depositing of welfare payments into people's accounts, which they frequently hailed as reducing bureaucratic mediation and the opportunity for corruption, thus increasing procedural transparency (Wani, Bhat, Alam & Mir, 2023). Lastly numerous accounts have uncovered a strong accountability gap, supporting the assertion that long durations of government rule and removal of accountability channels, including the absence of an elected legislative assembly, removed an important level of vertical accountability (Hoffman & Duschinski, 2014).

While prior studies have considered decentralization, transitions in security, and reforms in governance since the abrogation in present-day Jammu and Kashmir, there are still significant gaps in these studies. Specifically, research just hasn't really explored the question of whether administrative reforms and Panchayati Raj Institutions were meaningfully transitioned to democratic forms of participation and accountability. The studies on security mainly focus on counter-insurgency but fail to assess trust in the citizen-state relationship, human rights implications, or consider democratization. The governance literature primarily focuses on digital shift in governance and welfare delivery, but does not capture the experiences of marginalized groups in terms of inclusion and representation. Additionally, there is no meaningful long-term study on the effects of abrogation on the deepening of democracy, social reconciliation, and sustainable peace. Therefore, it is important to consider the context in a holistic inquiry of the interlinkages of the political, security and governance perspectives to understand how decentralization, democracy and governance can meaningfully be strengthened in Jammu and Kashmir.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design aligned with its three objectives to ensure analytical rigor and methodological clarity. The qualitative data of political change and decentralization (Objective-1) include the constitutional amendments, parliamentary discussions, policy papers and

judicial rulings are grouped with the quantitative data of elections collected by the Election Commission of India and analysed by means of descriptive and trends analysis. The shift in security relations and the role of military services (Objective-2) is evaluated based on the qualitative analysis of government publications, findings of parliamentary committees, and security policy documents with the help of the quantitative data about security incidents and trends of military deployments received in the Ministry of Home Affairs. To examine inclusive and responsible governance (Objective-3), the methodology applies the social approach to qualitative content evaluation of civil society reports, media stories, and scholarly literature and quantitative data on Census records and government databases on welfare to operationalize the constructs of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, and be able to comparatively and inferentially examine the outcomes of governance following abrogation period.

RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

Objective 1: *To analyse the political transformation in Jammu and Kashmir post-abrogation of Article 370 and 35A, focusing on decentralization, elections, and reforms.*

This objective investigates the continuing political change in Jammu and Kashmir characterized by a conscious process of decentralization and structural reform. Article 370 and 35A's abrogation is regarded as the legal trigger by the central government for negating the state's special status and division of Jammu & Kashmir as Union Territories. As highlighted in the Supreme Court's 2023 finding in *Dr. Shah Faesal and Others v. Union of India*, the Centre sought to promote the region's integration and identity as a cohesive political entity. The extension of electoral democracy is being facilitated by administrative means, including the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, which challenges traditional regional parties by replicating local democratic institutions and redirects political participation to the new District Development Councils (DDCs) (Robinson & Randhawa, 2024).

The study analyzes elections as a metric to help assess the normalization of the political process. The government argues that the abrogation has facilitated free and fair elections without the interference of dynastic politics, which is tested by its conduct of recent electoral exercises. The government cites high electoral turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, particularly in

the Kashmir Valley, as evidence of greater public engagement and decreasing alienation. This evidence, however, is often challenged by regionally based parties who argue that the turnout alone is not indicative of something normal and, moreover, they note that, there isn't even a democratically-elected state government in place yet. Therefore, this aim requires a critical study of how these elections and other processes of decentralization, in combination with new laws concerning land ownership and domicile, are reconstituting the political space and the political relationship of the region with the Indian Union (Kuttay & Majid, 2025).

Table 1: Electoral Participation in Local Body Elections (Post-2019)

| Election Type | Year Held | Total Electors | Voter Turnout (%) | Number of Constituencies Contested |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Block Development Council (BDC) | 2020 | 5.8 Million | 98.3% | 316 Blocks |
| District Development Council (DDC) | 2020 | 5.8 Million | 98.3% | 20 Districts |
| Panchayat By-Polls | 2021 | Varies by constituency | 80.1% (Avg.) | 13,000+ Panchayat Seats |
| Urban Local Bodies | 2023 | 1.7 Million | 78.4% | 1,145 Wards |

Source: <https://ceojk.nic.in/>

The period of post-abrogation governance has been marked by an organized staged approach to elections, purposely designed to decentralize political power and establish a new bottom-up political baseline prior to reconvening the legislative assembly. The journey began with the first level elections electing Block Development Councils (BDC) in 2020, quickly followed by the inaugural election of District Development Councils (DDC) in 2020, as the first meaningful election since the abrogation, framed as empowering local governance. The established bottom-up plan continued with additional Panchayat by-polls in 2021 to fill any vacancies thereby fully establishing the three-tier rural governance system outlined in the Constitution. The most recent step forward was the elections for Urban Local Bodies (ULB) in 2023, serving to complete this new structure of decentralized governance. Collectively, the staged elections contribute to the primary goal of highway normalizing the electoral process under the new constitutional

design and producing a new generation of local leaders and establishment of sustained stability in the political landscape through which eventual legislative assembly elections could emerge (Bhat, M. A., et al.,2024).

Objective 2: *To explore the changes in security dynamics and the role of armed forces in Jammu and Kashmir before and after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A.*

This study examines the security environment and the function of the military and paramilitary forces in Jammu and Kashmir before and after the constitutional changes of August 2019. Along with that, the plan aims to assess whether the revocation of Article 370 and 35A, which removed the special autonomous status of the region, engendered a measurable change in militancy, cross-border infiltration, civilian protests, and violence in total. Further, it will consider the potential shift in the armed forces' mandate from primarily conducting counter-insurgency operations, to possibly performing a greater range of law enforcement (policing), or peacekeeping, or supporting an in-transition civil administration in a recently integrated Union Territory (Kuszevska, 2022).

Table 2: Incidents of Killings and Casualties in Jammu and Kashmir before abrogation

| Year | Incidents of Killing | Civilians | Security Forces | Terrorists/Insurgents/Extremists | Total |
|------|----------------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| 2008 | 261 | 71 | 85 | 382 | 538 |
| 2009 | 208 | 53 | 73 | 247 | 373 |
| 2010 | 189 | 34 | 69 | 258 | 361 |
| 2011 | 119 | 33 | 31 | 117 | 181 |
| 2012 | 70 | 19 | 18 | 84 | 121 |
| 2013 | 84 | 19 | 53 | 100 | 172 |
| 2014 | 91 | 28 | 47 | 114 | 189 |
| 2015 | 86 | 19 | 41 | 115 | 175 |
| 2016 | 112 | 14 | 88 | 165 | 267 |
| 2017 | 163 | 54 | 83 | 220 | 357 |
| 2018 | 206 | 86 | 95 | 271 | 452 |

Source: <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/india-jammukashmir>

The ratio of incidents of killing and casualties serves to quantify the altered security environment. Prior to the abrogation, Jammu and Kashmir has a reputation for sustained levels of violence; regularity of militant attacks, encounters and civilian casualties is an indication of an entrenched, active insurgency that required the armed forces to assume a predominately military counter-insurgency role. In the time after the abrogation, official data often show a significant reduction in overall casualties (including security force personnel, militants, and civilians), implying a transition towards a controlled security environment; often this security environment is linked to perceptions of improved security through increased security, a tighter counter-infiltration grid, and the fact that there is no longer widespread civil unrest, which shifts the role of the armed forces in Kashmir to a logic of consolidating these gains and achieving sustained area dominance (Chauhan, 2024).

Table 3: Incidents of Killings and Casualties in Jammu and Kashmir after abrogation

| Year | Incidents of Killing | Civilians | Security Forces | Terrorists/ Insurgents/ Extremists | Total |
|------|----------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| 2019 | 135 | 42 | 78 | 163 | 283 |
| 2020 | 140 | 33 | 56 | 232 | 321 |
| 2021 | 153 | 36 | 45 | 193 | 274 |
| 2022 | 151 | 30 | 30 | 193 | 253 |
| 2023 | 72 | 12 | 33 | 87 | 134 |
| 2024 | 61 | 31 | 26 | 69 | 127 |
| 2025 | 27 | 28 | 12 | 36 | 77 |

Source: <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india-jammukashmir>

Conversely, a comparison of the security conditions of Jammu & Kashmir show a stark contrast by key metrics, since the abrogation of Article 370. The official statistics show a significant decrease in terrorist attacks, security force and civilian deaths, and more importantly stone pelting attacks in the Union Territory, and indicate an overall better situation with respect to law and order. Some of the reasons attributed to this positive trend are a much more robust counter-insurgency grid, reduced friction associated with identity politics in younger generations, and targeted action on many sources

of separatist funding; as well, there is still a serious threat of targeted killings and the inevitable cycle of militant recruitment, especially in the south of the Kashmir valley, which suggests a movement toward hybrid militancy; this is important, as it suggests that although the security situation has improved greatly, the fundamental issues of a targeted insurgency remain a problem set that is still evolving (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2020).

Table 4: Security Situation in Jammu & Kashmir: Comparative Analysis of Pre- and Post-Abrogation of Article 370

| Indicator | Pre-Abrogation (2016-2019 Avg.) | Post-Abrogation (2020-2023 Avg.) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Terrorist Incidents | 417 | 229 |
| Security Force Fatalities | 95 | 39 |
| Civilian Fatalities | 48 | 33 |
| Stone Pelting Incidents | 1,999 (2018) | 41 (2023) |
| Active Militant Recruitment | 130 (2018) | 50 (2023) |

Source: <https://jkpolice.gov.in/History>

Objective 3: *To study the governance mechanisms in promoting inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in post-abrogation Jammu and Kashmir.*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the governance mechanisms put in place in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the abrogation of its special status, specifically to determine how effective they have been in advancing the principles of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. This study will attempt to identify and analyze the specific policies, arrangements, and processes implemented by the governing authorities to determine how they support or impede an equal opportunity for all communities (inclusivity), to facilitate an open channel of information and decision-making processes (transparency), and to assign multiple lines of responsibility and accountability to decision-makers response (an accountability framework). Ultimately, we will provide a critical, evidence-based assessment of how efficient the current governance model is at establishing a stable, trustworthy administrative culture while navigating a complex transition phase in the region (Rajadhyaksha, 2020).

Table 5: Indicators of Inclusivity in Governance

| Indicator | Time Period | Data for J&K | Comparative Data (e.g., National Average or Other States) |
|--|---|--|---|
| Voter Turnout (%) | District Development Council (DDC) Elections 2020 | 51.42% | Unique election |
| Voter Turnout (%) | Lok Sabha Elections 2024 (Baramulla) | 59% (approx.) | Constituency specific |
| Number of Elected Representatives at Grassroot Level (Panchayati Raj Institutions) | As of 2023 | 35,000+ (approx. 28,000 Panches & 7,000 Sarpanches) | State specific |
| Representation of Women in PRIs | As of 2023 | Reserved seats: 33% (Constitutionally mandated). Actual numbers in proportion. | India Avg.: ~46% (of elected reps are women) |
| Per Capita Income (at Current Prices) | 2022-23 (Provisional) | ₹1,42,356 | India Avg.: ₹1,70,620 |

Source: <https://panchayat.gov.in/>

The selected indicators together provide a multi-dimensional frame of reference for evaluating inclusivity in governance in Jammu & Kashmir. The Voter Turnout (%) is a fundamental marker of political participation, as well as the public's confidence in participating in an electoral process. The Number of Elected Representatives at the Grassroot we take at the Community Level (Panchayati Raj Institutions is attached on to the Voter Turnout and directly enables local community representation, and therefore the amount of decentralised governance possible). Through the representation numbers we may regard the Representation of Women in PRIs as the significant gender inclusion marker because it ensures that the majority population demographic has some direct voice in the decision-making and policy-making that affects their livelihood, if not a say in the contentions involved. Finally, while moving away from political markers we need Per Capita Income acts as an important socio-economic indicator; and increasingly, if the per capita income shows

increases, it implies that people at least increased their chances of some governance benefits and that various development policies are translating into distributed benefits across the populace as wage earning participants in the socio-economic governance domain, with the probability of and greater economic inclusion and reducing the variance amongst region. Together, these markers go from claims of theoretical inclusion and citizenship in the governance designs of J&K to precisely quantifiable governing evidence of the degree to which governance systems are encompassing all aspects of the J&K society (Hajam, Rather, & Rashid, 2024).

DISCUSSION

The post-abrogation phase in Jammu and Kashmir has taken a planned and typified form with an opportunity for a multi-layered electoral process with a goal of distributing political power and a pathway to sustained democracy. The local body elections were conducted in an orderly fashion - they began with Block Development Councils (BDCs) in 2020, followed with District Development Councils (DDCs), Panchayat by-polls, and lastly Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), all signifying a planned move towards normal political representation and centering local leadership (Hussain, 2021). While official data relates staggering voter turnout rates (for example, 98.3% in BDC & DDC polls), the government uses these figures to signify a decline in alienation and an increase in public participation amongst the populace. However, author (Kaul, 2018) debate that high rates of voter turnout in the context of normalized politics may not be entirely feasible in Jammu & Kashmir, especially with the lack of an elected state assembly and the continuing deliberations about whether or not there can even be authentic representation.

The extension of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is illustrative of inclusionary governance, whereby the PRIs included over 35,000 elected representatives, as well as the legislative-mandated 33% reservation for women. Clearly, PRIs have a formal commitment to gender inclusion and paramouncy of local representation within democratic governance. Conversely, it reflects that Jammu and Kashmir is still lagging behind the national average quota of roughly 46% women representatives. Some of these results shed light on continued development disparities that will potentially prohibit full inclusivity when controlled by socio-economic factors such as per capita income in Jammu and Kashmir is ₹1,42,356 vs.

national average of ₹1,70,620 (Matloob, Shabbir & Saher, 2021). On the other hand there is insufficient data on violence and security post-2019 that have confirmed better conditions for improved governance. All told concerns remain about targeted killings and hybrid militancy that evidence it may be unfair to conclude Jammu and Kashmir has moved considerably closer towards inclusive democratic governance and development; furthermore, the evidence suggests the government has the momentum and environment to continue facilitating governance that is inclusive although much work remains (Mushtaq & Goswami, 2024). In summary, the abrogation has led to structural reforms in Jammu and Kashmir that are more plugged into the national trajectory in terms of democratic governance. Perhaps exemplifying the abrogated conditions for strengthened democracy and governance, in Jammu and Kashmir and more broadly and addressing the complicating factors mentioned throughout becomes a function of continuing political engagement to rectify interrelated inequalities in Jammu and Kashmir, not the least are socio-economic inequalities fabricating the relationships between state machinery and local populations.

CONCLUSION

The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A represents a major change in the constitutional, political, and administrative landscape of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as its relation to the Indian Union. The analysis in this report illustrates how core structural reforms, such as decentralization facilitated through Panchayati Raj Institutions, improvements in local representation, and a new policy framework have opened up more space for participation, inclusion, and accountability in local governance. However, the challenge remains to firmly institutionalize this into a sustainable democratic culture. On indicators of security, violence has decreased and law and order have seen improvement, yet targeted killings and a hybrid form of militancy still exist and operate as barriers to complete stability. Relatedly, while women, Scheduled Tribes, and non-permanent residents have seen some increase in their rights and entitlements, existent socio-economic divisions and slower rates of vertical accountability resulting from the lack of a state assembly inhibit any demonstrable sense of inclusion. However, the long-term process of consolidating peace, building trust, and representing representative democracy requires commitment, ongoing political will, and meaningful engagement with local communities.

Implications

The implications of this study suggest that the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A radically alters the governance and democratic structures in Jammu and Kashmir to both opportunity and risks. On the one hand, local governance in the framework of the Union of India provides opportunities for decentralized governance through Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), increased political engagement, and the extension of constitutional rights, especially relation to women, scheduled tribes or other non-permanent residents - and moving towards this gradual aspect of genuine inclusivity, along with transparency and accountability is the hallmark of good governance and a strong democracy. At the same time, and concerningly, the findings pointed to next set of limitations - limitations of an absence of local government, absence of a conviction regarding trust deficits, trust in governing authorities, hybrid form of militancy, and a lack of distributive justice when it comes to welfare and distribution of resources. Ultimately, to bring the implications together in summary, the need for political engagement is paramount, for social and economic is to reflect upon and strengthen democracy through some sort of reconciliation, and to respect constitutional changes as developments that people can draw legitimacy and experiential outcomes of inclusion from - informally and within formal processes - toward inclusive development in Jammu and Kashmir.

Limitations

The study has certain limitations that must be recognized. First, second-hand data sources such as bureaucratic reports, reports of policies and electoral statistics contain institutional bias and official narratives that do not necessarily represent the lived experiences of the local people. Second, while the study was able to juxtapose the developments prior to and after the abrogation, the study has relatively little time to cover since the abrogation and we are unable to consider the long-term consequences for democracy, governance and security in Jammu and Kashmir. Third, the study heavily emphasized the political, governance and security dimensions of the conflict, with little consideration given to the issues of social reconciliation, cultural identity and the psychological dimensions of the conflict situation, which are all relevant considerations for sustainable peace. And lastly, using statistical indicators as a reflection of the degree of inclusivity and democratic participation in Jammu and Kashmir, overly simplifies the social-

cultural context and do not take into account qualitative attributes, such as trust, legitimacy and fairness, that are still significant considerations of the democratic experience.

Future Scope

This study has future scope for an exploration of democratic transformation, inclusive governance, and security stabilization in Jammu and Kashmir beyond the post-abrogation phase. It is possible to conduct longitudinal studies that investigate the trajectory of electoral participation. The process of decentralization under the Panchayati Raj Institutions and political participation must be more democratic at the grassroots when legislative assembly elections are reinstated. There is also the promising future direction of interrogating the lived experiences of marginalized groups (e.g., women, scheduled tribes, displaced groups) to see if legal changes and policy reform equate to genuine opportunities and representation. The new security context during these changing times also has legitimate scope to understand and analysis hybrid-militancy, targeted killing, and balancing counter-insurgency operations and civil liberties. Even comparative studies with other parts of the world that have been affected by conflict or have special status can also afford the researcher an opportunity for better framing of governance models and adapting it to J&K. Future research would do much better by integrating both the political and the social with the security aspects to obtain systematic analysis for better understanding the sustainability of democracy, peace, and inclusivity in the future of the region.

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Place-Renaming as a Tool of Political Symbolism and Political Performance: Memory, Identity and Power in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses toponymic changes in light of the contemporary debates over memory, identity and power articulation. While drawing upon critical toponymy theory, performativity and the politics of memory, it seeks to take the idea of place-(re)naming beyond neutrality and mere administrative convenience to suggest that place-renaming involves political performance and political symbolism. By examining the recent examples of name changes, the paper argues that renaming is a power-laden concept that becomes a staged performance of ideology and legitimacy, where leaders put forth an idea of cultural revivalism, regional pride and historical correction to communicate and construct a collective history, marked by deliberate use of political symbols and communication. It begins by outlining the theoretical foundations of naming, memory and performance, thereby analysing the performative and symbolic dimension of recent ideological name-changes in Uttar Pradesh, embedding them within debates pertaining to power and identity. It further looks at the discursive role of media and society. The paper concludes by reflecting on the renaming process as a form as well as tool of symbolic governance and political communication in democratic India.

Keywords: *toponyms, critical toponymy theory, legitimacy, collective memory, cultural revivalism.*

INTRODUCTION

Naming and renaming of places has been a continuous, ever-evolving process. Streets, villages, towns, cities, districts and states are often renamed. In the modern world, where names are seen as identity markers, any place cannot remain unnamed and necessarily has to be named (Brasher &

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Alderman, 2023). What becomes important to analysis is who names and for what purpose; how is that naming or renaming carried out? Another important question of interrogation is: what explains the different reactions towards different name changes? While some remain low-key affairs, some become larger political issues or controversies. Why do some toponyms get more media attention than others? Why does renaming Allahabad to Prayagraj become an issue of national concern and coverage? What appears to be a neutral, every day, mundane exercise of theoretically changing a place-name isn't just confined to changing that name on the signboards and in the textbooks. It goes beyond it and implies changing the idea, memory and perception associated with that place in people's minds.

There has been a recent surge in name-change incidents across India. In Uttar Pradesh, it can be seen in a more profound, visible manner. A few prominent examples include renaming Allahabad as Prayagraj, Faizabad as Ayodhya, Mughal Sarai as Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Nagar. Many such demands and proposals such as renaming Muzaffarnagar to Laxmi Nagar, Aligarh as Harigarh, Ghaziabad to Gaj Prastha or Harnandipuram or Doodheshwar Nath Nagar, and Firozabad to Chandranagar, are also made. While renaming is not new to Uttar Pradesh and can be found during the entire known history, whereby places were renamed in accordance to the convenience and preferences of the political regimes, it becomes increasingly interesting to see how these recent cases of toponymic change become part of larger debates on nationalism, heritage and identity. The intensity and ideological framing in contemporary UP are distinct from that of earlier changes made in post-colonial times. Uttar Pradesh becomes an important site of examination, for it acts as a political center of India with the largest state assembly and a good share of the Lok Sabha seats, as well as for being the entry point in politics for many political leaders. Furthermore, UP projects immense cultural and religious symbolism due to the existence of many significant places such as Ayodhya, Mathura, Varanasi and Haridwar, among others. Renaming cases here reflect the intertwining of all the aspects of public life, especially religion, politics and memory.

Renaming functions as a political act, consciously staged and performed to create a public impression, often tends to exclude certain historical narratives and identities. For instance, when Allahabad was renamed as Prayagraj, the announcement was not just limited to the release of an official order. It was widely televised, popularized, ritualized and symbolically tied to a reclamation

of the Hindu Civilizational memory, marking a spectacular performative assertion of identity. While the conventional scholarship treats acts of place-name change as symbolic representation, this paper looks at such acts as political performances where ideologies and political inclinations are enacted on the political center-stage. This political performance is articulated through spaces. This perspective allows us to see place renaming as a consciously curated process involving meaning-making, legitimacy construction as well as identity articulation.

This paper seeks to answer and examine the following questions: -

1. How does place renaming operate as a tool of political symbolism and performance?
2. In what ways does the act of renaming articulate and reconfigure memory, power and identity?
3. How are these renaming efforts communicated to the people?

By using *critical toponymy theory*, i.e., treating naming as a non-neutral, political discourse; the *politics of memory* i.e., collective remembrance and forgetting; *performance theory* i.e., the politics as enactment of meaning and *critical discourse analysis*, this paper tries to analyze toponymic changes in the light of performative communication of power. It argues that renaming in contemporary Uttar Pradesh gets manifested as a deliberate tool of political symbolism which turns every day geography into an arena of memory, identity and power. This interplay between communicative (symbolic), enacted (performative) and emotional (memory) aspects gives rise to the ideological, cultural and electoral legitimacy to the government, leading to a mutual reinforcement of all these aspects. The following section highlights the interplay between toponymy, memory and performance in understanding the politics of renaming.

CRITICAL TOPONYMY, MEMORY AND PERFORMANCE

Place-names are not neutral identifiers. While appearing to be “ostensibly visible, quintessentially mundane, and seemingly obvious” (Azaryahu, 1996, p.312), they are in fact “potent symbols and material manifestations of identity” (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007). They are politically charged, ideologically driven texts which encode relations of power, ideologies and history, simultaneously acting as texts, arenas and performances (Alderman & Dwyer, 2015). Critical Toponymy theory (Rose-Redwood & Alderman,

2011; Azaryahu, 2011; Cacciafoco & Lim, 2021; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Rose-Redwood, 2011; Storey, 2011; Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009) as a theoretical field critiques the traditional and descriptive study of place-names and situates both names and the process of (re)naming within the domain of power, politics and identity formation. Naming, therefore, becomes symbolic inscriptions used by states and regimes to project authority and commemorate a particular aspect of chosen history which, more often than not, is accompanied by erasure of some other (silenced) aspect of history. It may also include efforts to control and standardize indigenous spaces (for example, British colonial renaming reflected the colonial efforts to standardize the indigenous places) or to assert identity and pride (such as post-independence renaming from Madras to Chennai which showed Tamil linguistic pride, or Bombay to Mumbai, which showed assertion of Marathi identity), and so on. Place names, therefore, are always vulnerable to “radical political orientations of the ruling order” (Azaryahu, 1990, p.34).

Significantly, renaming is not just political in nature. It is also mnemonic. It shapes how societies remember, what they are made to remember and what they forget. It shapes how places become repositories and sites of memory (Nora, 1989), how collective memory is socially constructed and maintained through institutions and symbols (Halbwachs, 1980), and how renaming intervenes in these memory processes and erases certain pasts by simultaneously elevating the other. Therefore, memory becomes an instrument of governance wherein the selective remembering legitimizes the present political power. Uttar Pradesh’s Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s recurrent speeches on Prayagraj emphasize reviving ancient heritage and correcting Mughal distortions. Such speeches act as acts of mnemonic framing. Similarly, during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, space was recast through the religious memory and historical symbolism. Renaming Mughalsarai as Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Nagar, replacing a Mughal reference with a nationalist leader’s name, can also be seen within the same light. This aligns the local geography with ideological commemoration.

The performative dimension of renaming shows how politics involves actors, audiences and scripts and how the ideas of social performance, cultural pragmatics and performativity combine to put forth a strong narrative. Political acts succeed when they are dramatically and symbolically effective and when they feel authentic to the audience. Identity, therefore, is constructed through repeated acts (Butler, 1990), and political identities, in this case, are enacted

through repeated symbolic gestures. This public performance becomes complete with ceremonies, speeches, rituals and media events. This makes the process a stage where leaders perform authenticity and authority, using geography and collective memory as their script and audience, respectively. Naming and memory, connected through this performance, give rise to political legitimacy. When such a performative resolution is assigned to ideological claims, the discourse gets transformed into a visible action.

A spatial act of changing a name becomes a communicative event, and the message reaches the people in a clear manner. Political regimes, therefore, convert symbolic acts into performative spectacles to maintain effective connection with the public. For example, the renaming of Prayagraj was followed by major branding efforts. Government ads, banners, and posters with slogans show how performative renaming enters the language of governance and becomes part of everyday collective identity. Masses also communicate back with this powerful political messaging, and thereby the mutual reinforcement happens. It can be said that while *toponymy defines what is remembered, memory defines why it is remembered and performance defines how it is remembered and enacted*. Renaming efforts in Uttar Pradesh can be understood as a performative exercise of power, which transforms space into a communicative symbol through which political legitimacy, collective memory and identity undergo continuous interaction and negotiation. This continuous interaction and negotiation add immense political symbolism to the process and vice versa. In order to understand the politics of renaming, it becomes necessary to understand the political symbolism embedded in the discourse. The next section, in doing so, locates renaming within the realm of political symbolism.

RENAMING AS POLITICAL SYMBOLISM IN CONTEMPORARY UTTAR PRADESH

In recent years renaming exercises in UP have moved beyond mere administrative reform and become acts of political communication and political assertion. Names of streets, stations, and cities have become mediums through which governments seek to visualize ideology and perform belongingness. In the last decade, several renaming proposals have been passed in the state. Via this political symbolism, abstract ideas such as pride, nationalism, revivalism get transformed into visible and repeatable signs. Various dimensions of symbolism are added to the narrative in order to serve

the purpose of the political class (See Table 1). Such symbolic layers, whether religious-civilizational, ideological or regional-cultural, add nuances to the process and serve different objectives while invoking various reactions and emotions amongst the masses. Every single act of renaming a place thereby symbolically redefines who belongs and whose memory counts. A map thereby becomes a symbolic battlefield of legitimation and identity. Place naming becomes a “platform for the construction of heritage and identity” (Alderman, 2008, p.196).

Table 1: Various forms of symbolism

| Symbolic Layer | Objective | Examples |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Religious-Civilizational Symbolism | To assert Hindu civilizational continuity and authenticity | Allahabad → Prayagraj, Faizabad → Ayodhya |
| Ideological Symbolism | To honour ideological icons and erase ‘alien’ references | Mughalsarai → Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Nagar |
| Regional-Cultural Symbolism | To evoke local pride and belonging | Jhansi Railway Station → Veerangana Lakshmbibai Jhansi Junction. |

Every renaming act, in varying degrees, performs erasure and commemoration at the same time: erasure of older names and commemoration of newer names, thereby producing a selective memory map and reinscribing ideology onto the physical space. In doing so, memorial toponyms act as “political technology” and are used to “order, govern or even resist the material and symbolic construction of places” (Rose-Redwood, 2011; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2008). Such symbolic projects operate through symbolic binaries between old and new, alien and authentic, forgetting and remembering and so on. Their efficacy depends upon public performance with the help of ceremonies, speeches and rituals which emotionally link the people to the act. Such governance by symbols has become an important phenomenon in the modern world.

Often such announcements and decisions are closely tied to election cycles and campaign speeches. Many announcements are made just before elections. Governments often frame them as restoration of sacred heritage and correction of historical distortion. It is amplified through media ads, TV debates and official documents which embed the new name into the bureaucratic and symbolic language. Such events are covered as public rituals. For example, the lighting of Diyas, aerial flower showers, and Ramayana

tableaux were broadcast live by national channels. Political communication and the media ecology of renaming play an important role wherein changed names are amplified and circulated through the ecosystem of advertisements, spectacle and media. Key communication modes involve official speeches and ceremonies whereby leaders publicly announce name changes and often link them to festivals or commemorations. Such temporal alignment between these acts and electoral communication makes renaming a form of symbolic governance which resonates emotionally with the electorate and often helps the government in gaining public support.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital (1989) provides another interpretive lens. Symbolic capital refers to the recognized legitimacy that accrues to those who control cultural meanings. Governments convert names into symbolic assets which yield political profit, gives them legitimacy, visibility and affective connection. Each name becomes a discursive monument after the political campaign ends and naming becomes what can be called a "potential manifestation of different socio-political dynamics – both discursive and material" (Adebanwi, 2012). Sometimes, it leads to erasing names with rival ideologies (for example, from Kanshiram Nagar to Kasganj and Ramabai Nagar to Kanpur Dehat). Through bureaucratic changes and documentation, renaming achieves permanence while entering institutional circulation such as in gazette notifications, postal codes, school textbooks, letterheads, maps, signboards, road signs, and digital maps. Media coverage by news channels, social media trends, physical symbols like government hoardings, official apps etc. create visual legitimacy and statues, memorials (Alderman & Dwyer, 2004) lead to performative reinforcement. Such materialization of symbolic power naturalizes the new name. This excessive branding visually normalizes the new toponym, which gradually gets absorbed into the everyday language. This communicative afterlife of renaming ensures that the symbolism is extended far beyond just the paperwork, and it becomes a continuous visual and discursive reminder of political authorship, while involving a well-curated process of political communication. The next section looks at renaming exercises with an analytical vantage point of political performance and political communication.

RENAMING AS POLITICAL PERFORMANCE AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Drawing upon pragmatics (Alexander, 2006) and Goffman's dramaturgical model (Smith, 2013), toponymic changes can be interpreted

as political performance where *actors* (political leaders, bureaucrats, media, anchors, religious figures) put forth a narrative in front of the *audience* (citizens, voters, global spectators) on the *stage* (physical space that is being renamed) via the *script* (discourses of revivalism, nationalism, pride, justice) and the *props* (statues, flags, press release, ceremonies, banners, memorials). These components together transform the act of renaming to effective political theatre and power gets ritualized. For instance, Jhansi Railway Station was renamed as Veerangana Lakshmibai Railway Station to honour Rani Lakshmibai's contribution to national history. It sent out the message of feminine heroism and invoked regional pride and nationalism, alongside the production of emotional legitimacy. In another celebratory move during October 2025, Ayodhya has set a new Guinness World Record by lighting 26.17 lakh diyas during its annual Deepotsav celebrations at the Saryu River. Political messaging embedded in the visual cues like lighting diyas, slogans, drones, flags invoke a common sentiment and convert politics into the media capital. Media then amplifies renaming acts into a continuous spectacle of belonging (See Table 2). Various medium of communication such as political speeches, media coverage, formal bureaucratic orders, public rituals and digital campaigns, operate in interesting ways to create a desired impact in terms of officializing the ideology, adding legitimacy to the process as well as creating symbolic collective memory. The emotive afterlife of these acts is immensely embedded in such medium of communication and the mode of performance.

Table 2: Medium of Political Communication and Mode of Performance

| Medium of Communication | Mode of Performance | Illustrative Examples |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Political Speeches | Legitimizing renaming as cultural restoration | CM speeches on Prayagraj, Harigarh proposals |
| Media Coverage | Amplifying symbolic narratives | TV debates, newspaper editorials framing it as 'historic correction' |
| Bureaucratic Orders | Transforming ideology into official | Gazette notifications framed with cultural references |
| Public Rituals | Legitimising through ceremony | Unveiling ceremonies of plaques/statues with party presence |
| Digital Campaigns | Sustaining symbolic memory | Social media hashtags and reactions |

The idea of emotional governance (Richards, 2007) becomes important to this analysis, for this explains how state cultivates specific emotions, pride, nostalgia, and resentment among the people and consolidates legitimacy. People reciprocate in several ways, such as by changing or updating their social media profiles or by rebranding their shops. Absorption of state-led emotional cues leads to aestheticization of politics, marked by politics of memory and performance. Media plays a central role in the narrative building by becoming the theater where the symbolic act of renaming meets the public life. Through press releases, ministerial speeches, celebratory visuals and digital campaigns, the linguistic change is converted into a communicative performance of ideology and renaming translates into political capital having visibility, emotional resonance and a sense of participation amongst the citizens. There is a deliberate branding of space during political speeches and election-time symbolism. It can be observed in the statements of CM Yogi Adityanath and other BJP leaders, who repeatedly refer to Prayagraj and Ayodhya as symbols of awakened pride and past glory. These speeches positioned renaming as a part of a cultural reclamation project. As Nash (1993, p. 51) puts it, “The attempt to recover meaning and original form of a place name is often linked to a search for a recovery of a lost relationship to place.”

On the other hand, there are also counter-narratives and counter-performances. Many such renaming projects are criticized by the opposition parties such as Samajwadi Party, Congress and Bahujan Samaj Party, being called exclusionary. Televised debates and social media clips turned renaming into a performative contest over legitimacy wherein every side sought to claim moral ownership of memory. Many social media hashtags also trended. Such digital negotiation demonstrates that naming is co-authored in the public sphere. Meaning is not fixed merely by the State; it is rather articulated, debated and at times even resisted through participatory media cultures. Public reception is never polyphonic or unidirectional. Citizens do not merely consume the act but rather reinterpret it (Yeoh, 1996). This reinterpretation when contextualized within the spheres of memory, identity and power determines the final impact and reconfigures the spatial politics. The following section tries to understand renaming as spatial politics, with the lens of memory, identity and power.

MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND POWER: INTERPRETING RENAMING AS SPATIAL POLITICS

Every act of naming and renaming of a place is a negotiation over space as meaning. These names transform the geography from a neutral terrain into a symbolic landscape which regulates memory and defines who belongs and who does not. To control names is to control the narrative behind them, and to control the narrative is to control belonging. Political power therefore extends to the semiotic control over the place (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009). Renaming acts as a mnemonic governance wherein the state decides which pasts are celebrated and which are silenced. Different pasts can be remembered by invoking civilizational continuity, recovering forgotten heroes or constructing a lineage between contemporary rulers and revered ancestors; forgetting can be done by effacing contested and alien histories and omitting colonial layers (Connerton, 2008; Verovšek, 2017). Such curated remembrance acts as a deliberate archival editing of the collective consciousness of that place. Similar references can be seen across the world. South Africa's post-apartheid renaming sought restorative justice through this memory inclusion (Guyot & Seethal, 2007); Eastern Europe's post-communist renaming Germany's post-Nazi renaming (Azaryahu, 1990; Post & Alderman, 2014) marked democratic transition. In India, such renaming privileges cultural and national revivalism. Identity, therefore, is materialized in toponyms. Maps become the mirrors of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). Citizens internalize the new official language, and everyday compliance with the new names reproduces ideological normalcy. The society also reciprocates with the new names and an effective consent gets created.

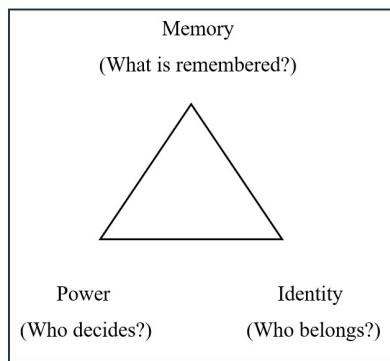


Figure 1: Triadic relation between memory, power and identity. Power shapes memory. Memory shapes identity. Identity legitimizes power

There is a triadic relationship between memory, power and identity (See Figure 1). Power shapes memory through institutional decisions, memory shapes identity through the narrative inclusion, and identity legitimizes power through emotional consent. Renaming operates at the intersection, negotiating all three dimensions of public life. It becomes a multivalent act which is simultaneously political, cultural and pragmatic. It provides democratic visibility when local heroes, women leaders, Dalit icons are recognized. Revival of indigenous toponyms lost to colonial transliteration (like Banaras and Kanpur) leads to cultural preservation as well as administrative clarity; strategic use of historical identity for economic development also boosts tourism and heritage branding. Varanasi's ghats, streets and tourism zones have undergone micro-level renaming and beautification drives. Names like Shri Kashi-Vishwanath Corridor Project go beyond mere renaming to rebranding (Graan, 2016) the identity and reclaiming the historical heritage.

CONCLUSION

The renaming of places in Uttar Pradesh is neither a neutral administrative act nor merely a cultural correction. It is a symbolic governance through which the state constructs legitimacy by invoking signs, symbols and memories. Changes in place names produce what Henry Lefebvre (1991) calls conceived space, i.e. a space encoded with ideological values of those who plan and govern it. Great nationalistic vocabulary is inscribed onto the everyday landscape, which then becomes spatially visible and practiced. In this sense, renaming performs the memory work by transforming the landscape into a living archive of chosen histories. Figure 2 explains the relationship between renaming acts and political legitimacy exploring how the symbolic, performative and mnemonic aspects of toponymic change invoke communicative and emotional response in the society which, in turn helps build the political legitimacy of the political class.

The study set out to explore how the act of toponymic change in contemporary Uttar Pradesh goes beyond bureaucratic adjustment and becomes a deeply performative and symbolic articulation of power. Drawing upon the frameworks of critical toponymy, political performance and the politics of memory, the paper has tried to link the political act of renaming a place with everyday lived practice and associated aspect of public life. It has studied how renaming acts as a convergence of communication, power and identity, simultaneously co-authored and negotiated at the level of society,

used as an instrument of ideological, cultural and electoral legitimacy-building in the Indian democracy.

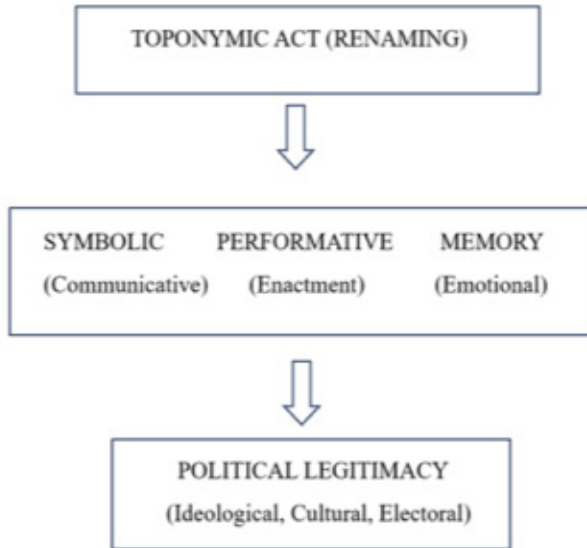


Fig. 2: Relationship between renaming acts and political legitimacy

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Caste Census in India: Colonial Roots and Contemporary Debates

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ABSTRACT

One of the primary challenges for the post-independence political and administrative community in India has been the demand for a comprehensive and detailed caste census. While no caste list has appeared in the National Census since 1931, this list remains highly contentious in discussions of social equity and the efficacy of affirmative action. To gain insight into the overall picture of national politics today, one must view it through the evolution of caste enumeration from the flexible caste system existing before the British colonised India to the rigidly defined categories imposed by the British to the subsequent use of caste for political gain in today's India. The discussions today are not just about who gets counted, but whether the reservation policy currently in place is genuinely beneficial to the most vulnerable members of the Other Backward Classes (OBC), or whether it simply entrenches the authority of the "creamy layer" at the top of the OBCs. The paper examines the historical trajectory of census practices in India, tracing their colonial foundations and analysing contemporary debates surrounding caste enumeration and representation. It engages with both archival sources and recent policy discussions to highlight how the census remains a site of political negotiation and identity formation in postcolonial India.

Keywords: *Census, Colonialism, social equity, identity politics, Divide & Rule, Creamy Layer.*

INTRODUCTION

India is often termed as “the epitome of diversity in the world.” It's diverse in terms of ethnicity, regions, religion, class, caste, etc. However, the integral unity within these diverse cultures and traditions cemented the bond among Indians to live together. Syncretism among religions plays a significant role in shaping social norms, cultural values, and the belief systems of Indians. Therefore, syncretic elements and rationality within Dharma have typically been used to legitimise socio-religious reforms in Indian society in the 18th-19th century.

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Wanderers from different corners of the world have usually come to India as travellers, who later became traders and, in the last days of the Mughal era, finally conquerors. The foreign visitors found India's diversity exceptional and noted its syncretic character in their travelogues. Some of them settled in India and assimilated into its ever-blooming diversity. It is an excellent mission to create laws and policies that reflect the diverse aspirations of people with varied characteristics and culturally distinct backgrounds. Those laws and regulations were made instruments for overall development, keeping diversity in mind, which was the primary purpose of the census, conducted once every ten years since 1872.

FOUNDATION OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Before colonial rule, caste, or *Jāti*, was a locally contextual, flexible, and dynamic system of social stratification, rather than a single, monolithic, all-India hierarchy. Scholarly analysis, such as Nicholas Dirks's *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India (2001)*, challenges the notion of caste as an unchanging, purely religious, or "spiritual essence" of India (Dirks, 2001). Dirks argues that in pre-colonial kingdoms, particularly in South India, the power of local kings (Kshatriyas) and the political economy of land and tribute were often more significant than the ritual supremacy of Brahmins (priests). Caste identity was fluid; groups could, and did, change their status over time through military success, land acquisition, or by employing Brahmins to fabricate suitable genealogies. Pre-colonial records, such as *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Rajatarangini*, contain lists of communities, but their nature is descriptive rather than a rigid, all-India hierarchy (Dirks, 2001).

Unlike earlier conquerors, the British did not intend to settle in India as natives and assimilate into the local populace. They came as traders, primarily to exploit and plunder India's vast resources. The East India Company (EIC) was established in the subcontinent in 1600 AD, but the British were not the only one's eyeing India's rich reserves. The British arrived in India after the Portuguese and French had already been there. Since many other European countries, apart from Britain, were also in India for trade, they sought the same privilege to exploit the country's resources. Therefore, given the aspirations of other European colonial powers, such as the French, Dutch, and Portuguese, the East India Company began consolidating its control over India. The other European powers, other than the Portuguese, were France and the Netherlands. Since all of them wanted a level playing field for trade

in India and economic exploitation, it became essential for the East India Company to assume control of India to establish a strong foothold. By the mid-18th century, India was almost under British colonial rule. Although the Mughals were a dominant and most significant power in India until the 17th century, many small kingdoms exerted local influence.

British colonialism can be divided into two phases since its arrival in India: the 1st phase spans from the Battle of Plassey to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, and the 2nd phase spans from the aftermath of the Sepoy Mutiny to India's Independence in 1947. The British East India Company took control of India's administration to consolidate its rule. However, they avoided intervention in the country's social and cultural spheres and concentrated on maximising their profits in trade and commerce. The colonial rulers continued the existing customs, traditions, and rituals of contemporary India to win the confidence of India's dominant class and consolidate British rule (Bandyopadhyay, 2004).

After the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the reputation of the East India Company came down significantly. Therefore, the British Crown took direct control over India. Observing the unity among different sections of Indians against the British Raj. Thus, they now tried to divide the people on issues such as caste, class, and religion to break the growing nationalist sentiment among Indians.

THE STRUCTURE AND VALUES OF INDIAN SOCIETY AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

The British were well aware that they couldn't rule India unless they became familiar with indigenous rule and won the native's trust. Therefore, the rulers must have a critical understanding of people's culture, traditions, customs, and other aspects of society that mainly influence people's lives. The British tried to legitimise their control over India as a civilising mission, claiming they were more civilised and modern than the Indians. As Edward Said defines 'Orient' as "Europe's greatest, richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestants and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other" (Said, 1978).

With the arrival of modernity in the 19th century, there was an increasing interest in studying the eastern societies (Orientalism), including their culture, traditions, and languages, which were previously known only to the elite, learned men of society, such as Brahmins and Maulvis.

Orientalism, according to Said, was a vested knowledge imposed from above by Europeans; moreover, it was shaped as per colonial needs and endorsed by all, as the colonial powers themselves legitimised it. Subsequently, the orient concept became invaluable to the British because it empowered them to conform to the society they governed, facilitating efficient administration.

In accordance with their profit interest through unrestricted commerce and revenue gathering, the EIC attempted to eliminate the debris of the Mughal Empire. The initial stage begins at the village level, establishing their dictatorship by seizing the powers of local rajas and zamindars (who used to dominate there). They justified this on the basis that natives were not aware of freedom, and that's why their crooked nobility class easily exploited them. Here, the story doesn't end unilaterally; the Fort William College attempted to counter the ideas of emancipation promoted by the French Revolution. They believed that concepts such as liberty, property, and the rule of law would make individuals more conscious of their freedom and further modernise the framework of Indian society, thereby ensuring the liberation of their members. So, Lord Cornwallis and Thomas Munro introduced the Permanent Settlement (Bengal) and the Ryotwari Settlement (Madras and Bombay presidencies), respectively, giving the idea that it would preserve India's village communities. Still, if seen closely, both systems closely followed the tenets of supreme governance and the inviolability of personal property to be safeguarded by colonial rule. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay observed that the British wanted the company's government in India to be vindicatory rather than regulatory; thus, they sought to adopt Indian traditions of native governance (Bandyopadhyay, 2004).

CASTE SYSTEM AND THE RELIGIOUS LAWS

Indian society has been divided based on caste since ancient times. According to Hindu scriptures, society was divided into a four-fold classification into the hierarchical order (also called the Chaturvarnya system): Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. This division initially was based on occupation, but gradually it gave way to a caste system based on birth. For example, a Brahmin's child would be born a Brahmin, and a Shudras descendants would be Shudras.

To establish a strong foothold in the country's administration, the British needed to comprehend the societal structure and adapt it accordingly to bolster

the British Raj. Warren Hastings designed his policies based on the principles of Orientalism, and the vanquished populations were to be governed by these rules and regulations, thus laying the groundwork for the codes of Hindu and Muslim law. The ancient Hindu Dharma Shashtra served as the basis for Hindu law, while Muslim law was based on interpretations of the Quran by Maulvis and Maulanas. Hastings introduced the new judicial system. Every district was to have courts on two levels: one for criminal justice and the other for adjudicating personal matters, based on Muslim law for Muslims and Hindu law for Hindus. The division of legal topics followed the English system of classification. The civil courts were presided over by panchayat officials and were assisted by Brahmin pundits and Maulvis for interpreting indigenous laws (Ketkar, 2021). It caused a lot of confusion as they were based on various Dharmashastras and varied from case to case; therefore, Hasting formed a committee of eleven pundits and codified the Hindu laws in 1775 and the Muslim laws by 1778. Thus, standardisation of laws centralised the judicial authority, and the administration was reduced to the system.

Manusmriti compiled by the Brahmins, deals with range of topics concerning social and religious life that includes: sacraments (samskaras); initiation (upanayana) and study of the Vedas (the sacred texts of Hinduism); marriage, hospitality, obsequies, dietary restrictions, pollution, and means of purification; the conduct of women and wives; and Raj dharma, the Karma theory, the soul, and life after death (heaven or hell). According to the Manusmriti, the Hindu society was divided into four varnas. It further states that Brahmins emerged from the mouth of Brahma, symbolising that they are intellectuals born to gain and spread knowledge. Kshatriyas emerged from the hands of Brahma, which symbolises strength, and they are meant to fight wars and protect people; therefore, kings and rulers were considered Kshatriyas. Vaishyas emerged from the thighs of Brahma and were bound to be merchants and traders. Shudras emerged from the feet of Brahma; therefore, they were the lowest caste and bound to be slaves and servants to the upper castes. Since this hierarchy in society was decided by God, as described in the Manusmriti, this could not be changed (Shah, 2004).

CASTE SYSTEM AND THE BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

The British Colonial administration, especially after the 1857 Rebellion, drew their attention to the unity among the people, which might have had adverse consequences for British rule; therefore, it was vital for them to

devise policies to curb this unity by exploiting the caste, class, and religious differences ingrained in society thus began to systematically collect and classify information on Indian society in disguise to facilitate governance, revenue collection, and military recruitment. This deliberate "knowledge project" was driven by ill will, a divide-and-rule policy, or at the very least, a powerful administrative imperative, which led to the codification and essentialization of caste.

To strengthen its position in India, the colonial rulers heavily relied on Indian scriptures. They believed that the scriptures contained essential facts that could be used to create deep divisions in society. They were used very tactfully by the Britishers to divide the people based on caste and religion and thus weaken any mobilisation against the Colonial Rule. An important fact to note here is that all the British officials were great scholars, for example, Thomas Munro in Madras, John Malcolm in Central India, and Elphinstone in Maharashtra, who contributed significantly to various historical and geographical arenas, in addition to their contributions to political and military issues. The legitimacy granted by the British government to customs and traditions found to be favourable to the growth of the British Empire and its smooth functioning, along with the existence of various caste conflicts in society, transformed Indian society into a traditional and backward one (Carroll, 1978).

The British can't be put at fault for the resurgence of the social stratification (varna system) in society, but, according to Bryce, since the Brahmins were unwilling to compromise their dominant position, they supported the British government's will. As Ludden stated, the term 'Hindu' initially referred to the people living east of the Indus. However, the British used the term in their official census and elections to describe those who were not Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists, or Sikhs. Though British India had Hindus as a majority, this community was not homogeneous like Islam and Christianity, which followed one Quran and Bible, respectively. Instead, the Hindus followed different religious leaders or worshipped other Gods and Goddesses. For example, some Hindus worshipped Vishnu and called themselves Vaishnavas, while those who worshipped Shiva were known as Shaivites. The Hindus recognised themselves as Vaishnavas, Shaivites, etc., rather than as Hindus (Ludden, 2006).

As we can see, the Brahmins drew closer to the British to maintain their social and economic superiority. The Brahmins were learned and held a

superior position in society; they enthusiastically participated in the country's financial machinery and collected taxes from the people for the government under the Zamindari system. This cemented good relations between Brahmins and the British.

In the 19th century, Thomas Munro introduced the Ryotwari system, which directly collected taxes from farmers. Munro believed, as Burton Stein argues, that he stood firm that the customary Indian forms of governance would administer efficiently if “directed by men like him, knowledgeable and sympathetic, with tremendous and concentrated authority. Such a despotic attitude makes Indians step out of direct political participation. Another example of the Brahmins' benefits was their role in administrative services under the British government, where they were represented in large numbers compared to the other castes (Arnold, 2011).

The idea of liberalism emerged in the West during the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, which also gave rise to various social and religious reforms. The western-educated elite, in the march of post-enlightenment rationalism, attempted to reform Hinduism internally. The Hindu customs, traditions, cultural practices, and caste system were being criticised, and an intellectual challenge was posed against the religious and social orthodoxy of Hinduism. Western-educated liberal intellectuals also shared similar views about Indian society and its people, such as Raja Ram Mohun Roy, who initiated various reform movements against practices like Sati and Devdasis. They attempted to promote widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages, and other reforms. With the contribution and endeavour of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the British government under Lord William Bentinck legally banned the practice of Sati in 1829. These social reformers undertook to reform their societies and their religious practices, and to abolish evil practices (Jones, 1989).

Through the introduction and dissemination of modern scientific education, Lord Macaulay sought to promote rational thinking and liberate Indians from the constraints of religious and social orthodoxy. The intention behind the spread of English education was not only that, but according to Macaulay, it was also meant to create “a class of persons between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect.”

THE REVOLT OF 1857 AND COLONIAL RESPONSES

After the Revolt of 1857, the East India Company faced a backlash and lost its autonomy over India, which was subsequently transferred to the British Crown by the Government of India Act, 1858. The Governor-General's official rank was revoked, and thereafter the Viceroy acted as the representative of the British Crown in India. Although there were many reasons for the fall of the Company Rule, the primary one was the Company's interference in the people's religious affairs. By late January 1857, rumours spread that the cartridges of the new Enfield Rifles were greased by cow and pig fat deeply offended the sentiments of both the Hindus and the Muslims as the cartridges had to be bitten off from mouth before loading, it made the sepoy's old suspicion about the plot of Britisher to destroy their religion and caste and convert them to Christianity. The Revolt of 1857 made the British realise the fact that unity among the people might have had adverse consequences for British rule; therefore, it was vital for them to devise policies to curb this unity by exploiting the caste, class, and religious differences ingrained in society. This deliberate Divide-and-Rule master plan proved fatal for the country. It later led to the partition of the country into India and Pakistan on a communal basis. (Bandyopadhyay, 2004).

The process of rebuilding the army raised questions about the proportion of Hindus and Muslims in government service. Apart from this, it was also a matter of concern for the government to determine its policies towards the classes that had been fortunate enough to have access to education. The revolt prompted Queen Victoria to announce that British officials would not interfere in their subjects' religious matters and would respect the people's spiritual and social sentiments. Queen Victoria also led Indians to believe that there would be no discrimination based on caste, class, religion, or race, and that education opportunities would be available to all equally. However, in reality, this wasn't the case, as the lower classes were still deprived of these facilities while the upper classes maintained their domination. After the Revolt of 1857, the British government assumed control of India's administration and adopted a policy of non-interference in the country's religious sentiments. Indian society was so engrossed in itself that it did not realise that the specific guidelines of colonial rule were intended to divide society to prevent revolts similar to the 1857 uprising. Therefore, it followed the following policies to fulfil its interests.

Therefore, the colonial census operations between 1881 and 1931 systematically institutionalised caste divisions for administrative purposes. H.H. Risley, the 1901 Census Commissioner, regarded caste as "the cement that holds together the myriad units of Indian society. Risley's anthropological approach, grounded in refuted anthropometric science and racial hierarchy theories, significantly influenced how caste categories were imposed within Western paradigms. Colonial administrators instituted hierarchical communities that hadn't previously existed. In the Bengal region, "Chandala," a broad descriptor for low-caste people, was erroneously treated as a specific caste name by authorities, sparking significant resentment (Risley, 1904). Similarly, sub-castes such as Yadav and Vishwakarma came up as official categories for geographically disparate communities that shared traditional occupations.

REBUILDING OF THE ARMY BASED ON CASTE

During the Revolt of 1857, soldiers refused to fire on rebels from their region or of the same caste. Consequently, the British decided to build an army loyal to their masters and to refrain from resisting military operations anywhere in the country. As a result, the British government appointed the Peel Commission to investigate the military affairs. The commission observed that the "native army should be composed of different nationalities and castes, and as a general rule, mixed promiscuously through each regiment." Consequently, over time, significant changes were made, including disbanding the regiments responsible for the 1857 mutiny. The army was reformed to avoid domination by a particular caste, and regiments were constituted by evenly mixing all castes. The recruitment of the military remained concentrated in Punjab, which had maintained loyalty during the Mutiny, and regional elements were strictly segregated to minimise cross-cultural cohesion. The British colonial authorities utilised their perceived knowledge of Indian culture and rituals of racial-ethnic groups to develop the basic understanding of "martial races". Apart from this, the British also attempted to foster discontent between the Aryans and the Dravidians. Therefore, it not only tried to divide the people by caste but also by region and language. Aryans resided in Northern India, and Dravidians were a South Indian race speaking Dravidian languages (Said, 1993).

Another policy adopted by the colonial rulers to maintain a stronghold on Indian soil was the proposal for a census and enumeration. In the 19th

century, censuses were primarily introduced in many countries. The purpose of conducting these censuses was to assess poverty levels in these countries and, if necessary, provide state aid in their benefit. Examining census data from European countries, they appeared to be secular institutions, but were a stark contrast to the situation in India. The census process introduced in India was aimed at gathering information on the caste structure of society, rather than providing economic benefits to people. After the 1857 Mutiny, the study of languages, race, religion, caste, and other aspects in India became important for British Rule, and the Regional Gazetteer was appointed to collect data for this purpose. There were several deliberate reasons for the British starting the caste census in India. The British sought a critical understanding of Indian society and norms to administer it effectively, enabling them to exploit its resources and revenues. According to Ramachandra Guha, “census enumeration was not a novel practice adopted by the British, but was equally practised in earlier times, particularly in the Mughal period. However, the fact remains that the earlier enumerations were very much confined to land revenue and taxation, and were also geographically limited. In contrast to this, the colonial census was interested in anthropological knowledge and was carried out, covering most parts of the country” (Guha, 2003).

Initially, the census included questions on family, religion, education, caste, health, and other related topics. The information thus collected would have been used for administrative purposes; instead, the census data was used to develop knowledge about India and to apply it. The enumeration of castes led to a better understanding of the structure and the existing cleavages in the society. Therefore, the British government succeeded in creating a culture in which caste identity became synonymous with national pride. Similarly, the question of religion became fundamental to the census, and the data was used in different ways. For instance, the history of India was no longer divided into Ancient, Medieval, and Modern periods, but instead into Hindu and Muslim periods. Therefore, we can say that the purpose of the census in India was to create tension among various societal groups and thus curb the sense of nationalism that might emerge against British rule. The diversity in the Indian scenario was not new, but it did not have the prominence it has today; it was only after the census that these cleavages widened and deepened.

The Census was introduced in 1872 and was based on caste and class, as the colonial rulers believed these two factors were the most prominent in Indian society and required deep study. According to this, within Hinduism, there were various caste classifications, and within Muslims, castes were

classified as Syed, Sheikh, Pathans and Moghuls. Again, in the year 1881, a census was conducted throughout British India, with priority given to questions on race and caste, followed by those on religion. Thus, this became the basis for subsequent censuses, conducted every 10 years. The 1891 census was based on caste categories defined by occupation. The 1901 census, under the chairmanship of H.R. Risley, emphasized caste categories based on social superiority and, for the first time, incorporated the category of tribals (Risley, 1904).

The colonial government conducted a census as early as 1856, but it was postponed due to the 1857 mutiny and finally held in 1861. Taking lessons from the 1857 revolt, the Home Government, in consultation with the Indian government, agreed to the general population census in 1871. However, the years between 1867 and 72 were spent on conducting the census. This series of censuses is known as the 1872 Census, which was neither the first census conducted after 1872, nor conducted across the subcontinent, nor did it cover the entire territory under British control.

Gradually, Indian society came to be divided along communal lines. Since the census revealed that Hindus were in the majority, the minority communities were convinced that they were politically and economically vulnerable compared to the majority. The government attempted to create hostility among different religious groups over social, political, and spiritual issues, thereby aiming to weaken the nationalist wave emerging with the advent of the Congress party under A. O. Hume in 1885. Unfortunately, the colonial government achieved success in its policy of 'Divide and Rule' when the Muslim League was formed in 1906-07, demanding a separate electorate. The government's long wait to break the unity of the people was thus fulfilled, and it acted promptly, first by partitioning the Bengal province in 1905 and then by granting reserved seats for Muslims in the imperial and provincial legislatures through the Morley-Minto Act of 1909. Later, the 1921 census focused on recognizing the backwards and deprived classes, but this was dropped in the 1931 census because it was found to be detrimental to colonial rule.

POLITICS OF CASTE AND RECOGNITION IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIA: REVISITING COLONIAL CATEGORIES

All sections of Indian society had enormous hope and aspirations for the newly independent country. Although colonial rulers suppressed every

section of the population, weaker sections of society, like the scheduled castes, tribes and other suppressed castes, were mainly victims of colonial suppression. Therefore, these sections were expecting more provisions & protections for their welfare from the newly democratic government. So, when the constituent assembly was formed, the matter of scheduled castes, tribes, and other backward castes frequently came up in its debates.

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATE OVER 'BACKWARD CLASSES'

In his maiden speech in the constituent assembly debate, dated December 13, 1946, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru used the term 'other backward classes' for the first time for those who were socially suppressed, other than the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Pt Nehru emphasised the need for special measures in favour of the scheduled castes, tribes, minorities, depressed and other backwards classes to complete the process of national integration after independence (Ramagoud, 2022).

Although the term 'other backward classes' was used by then Prime Minister Pt. Nehru, however, no special provision for the welfare of this section could be included in the Constitution. Dr Ambedkar suggested an amendment in the draft of the sub-committee on fundamental rights by adding a new section, Article 16(4), which states that 'the proposal would not "prevent the Government from prescribing a certain proportion of posts of public service for the minorities, whoever they may be. This provision was an extension of the existing Article 16 clause of the Indian Constitution. Against the inclusion of the word 'backward' via Article 16(4) in the constitution, many members of the constituent assembly raised their concerns on the interpretation and definition of the word 'backward' and sought its deletion or modifications. Loknath Mishra feared that the word 'backward' is presumed to be the symbol of insufficiency, while another member, Damodar Swarup, argued that although the word 'backward' may be just or reasonable, it is wrong in principle; therefore, it should be deleted. Shri Swarup further stated that the word "backwards" is not easy to define. He found this word not suitable for a secular country like India, as it gives rise to the tendency of casteism and favouritism. Some members, like Ari Bahadur Gurung and T T Krishnamachari, wanted that word defined by the House; it would lead to frequent court cases and be a lawyer's heaven. Some members, such as V I Muniswami, Chandrika Ram, and T Channiah, argued

in favour of this term and called for affirmative action to promote the welfare of backward classes.

Dr Ambedkar responded to all arguments against the inclusion of the backward classes in the Constitution. He said that *“Unless you use some such qualifying phrase as “backward” the exception made in favour of reservation will ultimately eat up the rule altogether ... that I think ... is the justification why the Drafting Committee undertook on its own shoulders the responsibility of introducing the word “backward” which, I admit, did not initially find a place in the fundamental right in the way in which this assembly passed it”*.

Dr Ambedkar redressed two prominent questions raised during the debate: firstly, the definition of the word, and secondly, the justiciability of the clause. The definition of the word, he left it to the local government to determine from time to time, considering the local socio-economic conditions. According to him, the backward community is the one the local government considers backward. Dr Ambedkar emphasised the justiciability of the word ‘backward’ (Ramagoud, 2022).

CENSUS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA AND OBCs

Following the colonial period, the Census Act of 1948, piloted by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, established the legal framework for independent India's census operations. India's first independent census, conducted in 1951, marked a significant departure from colonial-era practices. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's government decided to discontinue comprehensive caste enumeration, recording data only for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to facilitate constitutional reservations under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) for the most historically oppressed groups.

Despite the discontinuation, with the issuance of the 1961 directive, the federal government authorised the states to conduct their own surveys and formulate state-specific lists of Other Backwards Classes (OBCs). The direction enabled adequate unlocking of local dialects on caste sub-categorisation, on the one hand, and, on the other, managing the union government's disinclination to conduct an in-depth national caste census. This could be seen as an impressive strategic move in domestic politics, with political leaders diverting the appeal of caste census demands to state governments rather than tackling them at the central level.

MANDAL COMMISSION AND THE DEMAND FOR CASTE CENSUS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Coming to another noteworthy event in the context of the caste census initiative, which, no doubt, has a history of being the most controversial: the Mandal Commission, also known as the 2nd OBC Commission (1979-80).

- The Mandal Commission Report (1980): The foundational basis for the 27% reservation for Other Backwards Classes is reflected through this report. The report lacks contemporary caste data, which is why the Commission was forced to infer from the 1931 Census.
 - ◆ **Methodology:** To identify OBCs, the Commission categorically applied eleven criteria (social, educational, and economic) to form the basis of segregation. Crucially, it estimates the OBC population by subtracting the population of SCs, STs, and Forward Castes from the total Hindu population based on 1931 figures, and then applying that proportion to the non-Hindu population.
 - ◆ **Key Finding:** With the big takeaways from empirically conducting the survey, the Commission came up with the data that OBCs comprised approximately **52%** of the total population, justifying the recommended **27%** reservation in union government jobs and educational institutions (bringing total reservations to just under the Supreme Court's 50% ceiling in the *Indra Sawhney* case).

POLITICISATION BY RULING AND OPPOSITION PARTIES

How does caste in India structure the political realm? On this, Rajni Kothari (1970) suggested in "Caste in Indian Politics" that the disclosure of caste into the political realm enabled the mobilising and unification of a diverse social group into the democratic engagement process (Kothari, 1970). Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph (1967), *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, unravel how traditional institutions, like caste, could be adapted for modern political roles by initiating the concepts of the "modernity of tradition" and the "traditionalization of modernity," arguing that Indian democracy evolved by refashioning inherited social forms rather than erasing them (Rudolph, 1984). With the implementation of long-awaited recommendations of the Mandal Commission under the V.P. Singh, marking the beginning of the Politicisation of caste. This led to the transformation of the whole political playground, with the shift of power from the traditional

upper-caste elite to regional parties that portray the aspirations of OBC and Dalit communities. The party in power (the implementers) framed the verdict as a measure of welfare or social justice. At the same time, the opposition portrayed it as 'casteism' and a threat to national solidarity and effective administrative governance. Decades long, the political calculus has functioned in an involving manner, both ruling and opposition parties either openly called for a caste census (to show underrepresentation of OBC and take their vote base into confidence) or defying it (to keep the already prevailing power dynamics and steer clear of losing support from upper castes). This varied political stance suggests that the census is seen as less inclined towards being a purely administrative tool and more inclined to be a political weapon for the electoral assembly.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CASTE CENSUS (SECC), 2011

The very first all-inclusive attempt at caste enumeration was well represented in the SECC report 2011 since 1931. The Manmohan Singh government ratified this after a parliamentary debate in 2010; the census collects socio-economic data on rural and urban households, as well as caste data. Initially, exercise was launched from Sankhola village in West Tripura district, covering 24.49 crore households across India.

The 2011 census differed in many respects from a typical census operation. It made information disclosure voluntary rather than mandatory (as it did not operate under the Census Act of 1948), and assigned oversight of surveys in rural areas to the concerned Ministry of the government of India. Further, the Department of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation conducted surveys to take appropriate action regarding the issue. The Registrar General of India oversees the administration of the caste census.

DATA PUBLICATION AND SUPPRESSION

Although the socio-economic findings of SECC 2011 were published in 2016, the population of the caste remained unpublished. The collected data on caste was sent to the concerned Ministry (MSJE) of the Government of India. Then an expert committee under the chairmanship of Mr Arvind Panagariya was constituted for further classification. But the classification report was never made public, hence the caste enumeration exercise is considered incomplete.

Also, the suppression of the SECC 2011 caste data became a central political point of contention; opposition parties claimed the government's refusal to publish the results was proof of its bias against social justice policies. The fact that the data remained unpublished was a missed opportunity to make sense of contemporary caste demographics and their implications for affirmative action policies.

CASTE CENSUS AND POLITICAL CONTESTATION: CONTEMPORARY DYNAMICS IN INDIA

The Bharatiya Janata Party has in the past been opposed to, or at least wary of, caste census initiatives, claiming that such exercises would further deepen social divisions rather than promote national unity. In their replies to parliament in 2021 and 2023, the Minister of State (MoS) for Home, Nityanand Rai, said there were no plans to enumerate caste as a variable in upcoming censuses, calling caste enumeration "administratively complex and cumbersome. Prime Minister Narendra Modi constantly attacked caste-based politics, saying in March 2023 that India has only four castes: "the poor, the youth, women, and farmers. By this, he was trying to downplay social divisions by treating them as class rather than caste issues, and at the same time borrowing from Marxist theory to argue against caste-based political mobilisation.

OPPOSITION DEMANDS

Caste census was a central campaign demand of the Indian National Congress in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which Rahul Gandhi termed it as the "X-ray of Indian society". Jairam Ramesh, the head of communications for Congress, said the BJP had mocked Gandhi's statement earlier but is now following the policy, hence calling it a "decisive step towards ensuring social justice. Opposition parties have consistently argued that accurate demographic data is essential for evidence-based policymaking and the fair distribution of resources. Congress viewed the caste census as critical for understanding historical deprivation and for designing appropriate affirmative action policies. The party's demands included specific provisions: setting timelines, breaking the 50% reservation cap, implementing Article 15(5) for private education quotas, and reviving SC/ST sub-plans.

Regional parties decided to support the demand for a caste census for different reasons, guided by varied motivations. In Bihar, Chief Minister

Nitish Kumar's endorsement of a caste census strengthened his position within opposition alliances while meeting the needs of local political constituencies seeking greater OBC representation.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of the caste census in India is a mirror that reflects and echoes the country's most profound struggles between the constitutional ideal of equality and the sociological reality of entrenched hierarchy. The caste census saga reveals the unyielding tension between the demands of the administration, political plays, and social justice requirements. It was from the very beginning that the colonial enumeration aimed to tighten imperial control, and now, as debates about democratic representation rage, the caste census has always been an arena, a reflection of the broader struggles over power, identity, and belonging in Indian society. The evolving perspectives on caste from the colonial period, when it was 'fixed' and 'weaponised' as a political tool, to till today, current fights over the extrapolation of the 1931 census data have subsequently shown that an enumeration has been a contested act of state power. SECC 2011 data and the analysis cited by the Justice Rohini Commission provide a pretty stark picture, thus illustrating that, for the vast majority, the moot concept of upliftment is failing and that a 'creamy layer' problem does exist. In the wake of such developments, including the BJP government's decision to reverse the caste census and Supreme Court rulings on sub-categorisation, an evolving approach to caste-based policies is being gradually reviewed and modified. However, these changes largely reflect electoral strategies and legal moves rather than a clear, cohesive social vision, thereby affirming ongoing debate over the role of caste in Indian democracy. As time progresses, we should expand the scope of our attention to include other deserving people, irrespective of their historically generalised classification under certain caste groups or affiliations. After 78 years of independence, it is now imperative to accommodate all individuals who is in dire need of state's support by focusing on their current economic conditions and at the same time putting in place some restrictions on generational reservation benefits—thus, not only paying homage to real spirit and origin of affirmative action negotiated by our forefathers while drafting the constitution but also making them come true. In a vast, multicultural and multiethnic country like India, the experience suggests that a caste census cannot be worked out in isolation, avoiding broader questions

of social justice, democratic participation, and national integration. In the end, it should be instrumental in promoting equity without further dividing society and thus be in line with India's constitutional ethos.

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From Marketplaces to Ballot Boxes: The Evolution and Strategic Role of Marketing in Modern Politics

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ABSTRACT

Political marketing has evolved significantly from its early reliance on physical interaction and traditional campaigning to a complex, technology-integrated strategic process. This paper examines how the classical marketing mix—Product, Price, Place, and Promotion—translates into the political sphere and shapes contemporary electoral behaviour. The study outlines the foundational definitions of marketing proposed by the American Marketing Association (2017) and Kotler & Keller (2016), demonstrating their applicability beyond commercial markets and into politics. The paper analyses how political actors function as products, how voter trust operates as a psychological “price,” and how the dissemination of political messaging (“place” and “promotion”) has transformed due to digital technologies. A key focus is the expanding role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the role of social media influencers in reconfiguring political communication spaces, enabling unprecedented reach, micro-targeting, and personalised influence—but also introducing deepfake threats and ethical challenges. The paper concludes that political marketing has entered a transformative phase, where digital ecosystems and AI-driven tools amplify both democratic engagement and manipulation risks. Effective political communication now requires balancing innovation with transparency, safeguarding democratic trust in an increasingly digitised political environment.

Keywords: Political Marketing; Marketing Mix (4Ps); Digital Political Communication; Artificial Intelligence in Elections; Social Media Influencers; Electoral Behaviour in India

INTRODUCTION

India, the largest democracy, has seen a major evolution of the electoral process, starting with initial limited representations during the British era, to eventually transforming into a vibrant electoral system after independence. As the electoral processes evolved, so have the techniques used by the political

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representatives to lure voters to vote in their favour. The approach used by leaders to influence the majority opinion and win their votes has been one of the most remarkable changes in the electoral politics. Political Marketing has experienced massive growth in keeping with a socio-politically dynamic environment (Lilleker, 2011; Scammell, 2007). In the past, political parties and politicians used to campaign through grassroots, door to door, and other campaign to lure voters to vote in their favour. Although the mentioned way might appear outdated or even insufficient, it was one of the effective methods of interacting with the potential voters during the period when only a few avenues of direct communication were available (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Newman, 1999). Today, the landscape of political persuasion encompasses a broader array of techniques and mediums, reflecting the complexities of modern electoral dynamics (Norris, 2000; Strömbäck, 2007).

If we look at the most relevant and widely accepted definitions of marketing, i.e.—“the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” (American Marketing Association, 2017) and “a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others.” (Kotler & Keller, 2016) we can see that the focus is given upon how a brand or company can earn profit by actually providing the customers something that the customers may feel is value for their money. The two-way relationship between customers and a brand is not limited to the business field, but also extends beyond it. Applying the marketing frameworks to politics, we can see how relevant marketing is in determining the course of how one party is perceived (Lees-Marshment, 2009; Newman, 1999).

Marketing Mix

The 4 P’s of Marketing, also known as the marketing mix, refer to the four key elements that a firm controls to influence consumer decisions and achieve marketing objectives. These four elements are Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Together, they provide a strategic framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating marketing strategies (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2016). The product is the first element in the mix, referring to the actual tangible item that aims to solve a problem or satisfy a need of an individual, for which they are willing to pay a surplus amount,

which eventually counts as a profit for the company. Regarding value, it is attained by the customer when they are satisfied with the product, and along with that, they should have the feeling that the product was value for money, i.e., it must be reasonable in accordance with the value provided by the product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Third P stands for “Place,” which refers to the distribution channels and processes used to make the product accessible to consumers. Lastly, we have a promotion which includes all communication activities aimed at informing, persuading, or reminding consumers about the product. It covers advertising, public relations, sales promotion, digital marketing, and personal selling (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Newman, 1999). The marketing mix can be implemented in the field of politics. If we go through the electoral process, it can be compared to how different companies compete against each other to gain the majority market share. In politics, leaders and parties compete with each other to win the majority share, which will enable them to win elections and come into power (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Pich, 2019). If we look at this situation without focusing on the nature of the two disciplines, we can see a degree of resemblance, i.e., in both cases, the competition amongst the groups is on how much better they are than their competitor, and eventually, who amongst them is relatively able to solve or satisfy the needs of society (Lilleker, 2015). Whether it is a business or a political party, they cannot provide an absolute solution for all the needs and problems of society, as one particular product or idea cannot realistically satisfy everyone due to the dynamic nature of individuals and their diverse needs. So the competition is about how your product or idea is relatively better than your counterpart, keeping you at the top of the pecking order. To stay ahead of their competition, these institutions must also evolve and adapt to the changing dynamic environment (Lees-Marshment, 2009; Strömbäck, 2007).

Application of Marketing Mix Into Politics

The marketing mix, also referred to as the 4Ps of marketing, when applied to politics, can provide a deeper insight into the transition phase of a political party from being merely a political party to a well-established brand (Pich, 2019; Scammell, 2015). Starting with the first P of the marketing mix, that is “Product,” when applied to politics, refers to the Leader of a particular political party, along with the party and its ideology, which will then be perceived by voters or the public

as the solution to their needs and wants (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Newman, 1999). The rise of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is a relevant example illustrating how people seek solutions to their problems through these political parties or leaders who often act as products promising to address specific issues (Siddarth et al., 2021; Singh, 2019). The rise of Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) can be understood through the lens of political marketing, where political actors are treated as “products” designed to address public grievances. In the early 2010s, widespread frustration over everyday corruption ranging from bureaucratic bribery to large-scale scams created a clear gap in the political marketplace, generating public demand for an honest and credible alternative (Pal, 2015; Siddarth et al., 2021). AAP positioned itself precisely within this gap by constructing a political product centered on anti-corruption identity. The party’s offering combined Kejriwal’s personal image of simplicity and integrity, the party’s symbolism (such as the broom), and policy promises like the Jan Lokpal Bill, all of which framed AAP as a solution to the dominant societal problem of corruption (Chopra, 2019; Singh, 2019). In political marketing terms, the leader and party became a packaged product—where Kejriwal served as the embodied brand representing transparency, accountability, and resistance to elite privilege (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Pich, 2019; Scammell, 2015). This alignment between public need and political offering created what political marketing theorists call a strong “issue–solution fit,” enabling AAP to differentiate itself from mainstream parties and position itself as the sole credible alternative in Delhi (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Siddarth et al., 2021; Singh, 2019). As a result, voters perceived AAP not merely as a political option but as a targeted solution to their lived experiences of corruption, leading to unprecedented electoral support, including its landslide victory in 2015 (Election Commission of India, 2021; Siddarth et al., 2021). Thus, AAP’s rise illustrates how political leaders and parties function as products that promise relief from pressing societal problems, and how effective marketing of such products can translate into electoral success.

In a political marketing context, “Price” is not monetary; it is the cost the voter perceives when supporting a party or leader. The price paid by the voter in this case is a psychological cost, which is the trust a voter is putting into the vision of the political party. Choosing a political party or leader over another comes with an opportunity cost, i.e., if the selected leader comes into power and does not live up to the expectations, the psychological cost

will be of not selecting the right leader or party, and also now the voter will have to wait for the next 5 years until they get another opportunity to vote (Newman, 1999; Norris, 2000). Incumbency directly reinforces the idea that the “Price” a voter pays in political marketing is fundamentally psychological and tied to opportunity cost. When voters place their trust in a party and elect it to govern, they effectively commit themselves to a five-year political contract. If the incumbent government underperforms, breaks promises, or fails to meet expectations, the psychological cost for the voter becomes sharper: not only did they make the “wrong choice,” but they also cannot immediately correct it. This frustration amplifies voter dissonance because the price of misplaced trust must now be carried until the next election cycle (Kavanagh, 1995; Strömbäck, 2007). In this sense, incumbency magnifies the emotional and temporal burden on voters—supporting the argument that political “price” is not monetary but rooted in the long-term consequences of electing a party that does not deliver. It also explains why anti-incumbency emerges so strongly: dissatisfied voters seek to avoid repeating the earlier psychological cost, so they shift their vote to prevent another five-year period of regret. Thus, incumbency makes the voter’s opportunity cost more visible and more consequential, strengthening the political-marketing understanding that choosing a leader is a high-stakes emotional investment with long-term consequences (Lilleker, 2011; Norris, 2000). In Indian politics, there are many moments where voters who once trusted a government later felt disappointed and chose not to repeat the same mistake—showing how incumbency carries a real psychological cost for citizens. Delhi’s 2013 election is a striking example: after supporting the Congress for 15 years, many voters felt let down by rising prices, corruption scandals, and governance failures. This sense of “we trusted you and you didn’t deliver” pushed people toward the Aam Aadmi Party, leaving the Congress with just eight seats (Singh, 2019; Siddarth et al., 2021). A similar story unfolds across states like Rajasthan, where voters have almost never re-elected the same government since the 1990s. People often express a feeling of regret or frustration about the previous five years and choose a new party simply to avoid repeating that emotional and opportunity cost (Kavanagh, 1995; Norris, 2000). In Uttar Pradesh in 2017, many citizens who voted for the Samajwadi Party in 2012 shifted to the BJP because of deeper dissatisfaction with law and order and unmet development expectations—again showing how earlier trust turned into dissonance (Singh, 2019). Punjab’s 2022 election also reflected this

pattern: voters who had placed their hopes in the Congress in 2017 felt betrayed by internal conflicts and perceived non-performance, leading them to give AAP an overwhelming mandate (KAS, 2019; Singh, 2019). These incidents show a common emotional thread: when people feel that their trust has been wasted, they would rather switch parties than endure another five years of the same disappointment. This is exactly how incumbency magnifies the “price” a voter pays—not in money, but in regret, frustration, and the long wait until they can correct their choice.

“Place” in marketing refers to how a product reaches the customer and where it will be available for purchase. “Place” in earlier times were limited to the shops where people themselves had to go and by a particular product but in today’s time the availability of products are no more limited to the actual store but goes beyond the it i.e. the online channels which are the most popular channels where a product is made available and also the information regarding the product whether it is an advertisement, promotion or offer have all shifted from other areas to the online platforms (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the same way, “Place” in political marketing has also undergone a major transformation. Earlier, political communication and outreach were limited to physical spaces, such as rallies, nakkad sabhas, party offices, and local campaigning, as well as the distribution of pamphlets and posters. Voters had to be physically present in these locations to access political messages or interact with leaders (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Newman, 1999). Nevertheless, political messages today are not only limited to the offline space just like commercial products. The location where the voters receive political messages has grown exponentially with the rise of social media, online sources of news, direct mail to the target audience, WhatsApp discussions, YouTube speeches, and live-streaming rallies (CJR, 2019; India’s Center of Journalism, 2019; Mozilla Foundation, 2024; Time Magazine, 2019).

This change has transformed the way political marketing is conducted, as political parties can now reach anywhere in the world at any time without the need for physical presence. Online communities, the engagement zones on Instagram and X (previously with Twitter), personalized messages sent using the data acquired through the micro-targeting model, and digital platforms on which voters can consume the political content, fact-check information, and (fully) engage in the political discussions are included in the domain of political place (Lilleker, 2015; Pal, 2015; Singh, 2019). Consequently,

politics no longer remains confined to places, but has instead become digitally ubiquitous and gives the parties an opportunity to exist within the daily lives of the voters. This development shows that political marketing has had to accommodate the new technological forces just like commercial marketing by simply expanding the space in which voters can get in touch with political products that is, leaders, parties, ideologies and promises (Norris, 2000, Strombeck, 2007).

Since political marketing has evolved to include digital platforms, the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought a new understanding of the concept of Place in that it dictates where, when, and how the voter will receive political content. The AI-based algorithms on apps such as Meta, Google, and X control the types of political messages that a voter will see on his or her screen, generating customized places where a voter can be politically influenced (Islam et al., 2024; Pal, 2015). Parties now use AI tools for micro-targeting, sending customised messages to different voter groups based on age, caste, religion, location, and browsing behaviour. Chatbots, automated WhatsApp campaigns, AI-generated speeches, and digital avatars of leaders make political communication available 24/7, across millions of individual digital spaces simultaneously (Dhanuraj & Nair, 2024; Islam et al., 2024; Kar Singh et al., 2024). However, the same AI that expands access has also created serious challenges. During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, for example, an AI-generated deepfake video of Home Minister Amit Shah circulated widely on social media, showing him “supporting” a caste-based reservation policy that he never actually proposed. The Delhi Police later confirmed it was manipulated content designed to influence voters (Livemint, 2024; New Indian Express, 2024). In Mumbai, Police registered cases against some operatives making use of AI-generated voice cloning to create false messages (The Indian Express, 2024; The Print, 2024). Though AI seems to be a promising tool for marketing but these incidents highlights the double-edged nature of AI in political “Place”: (Islam et al., 2024; Kar Singh et al., 2024). while it assist in spreading out the message and ideas of a political party, at the same time it open doors for easy spread of miss information which often deceive the general public. AI can place political content in highly personalized digital spaces—but when misused, it can distort reality, unfairly influence voter perception, and undermine democratic trust. As politics becomes more digital, AI has

effectively turned every voter's phone into a political battleground, making "Place" more influential—and more vulnerable—than ever before (Barik, 2024; Dhanuraj & Nair, 2024; Mozilla Foundation, 2024).

In political marketing, Promotion represents all the tools, messages, and strategies through which a political party communicates its ideas and persuades voters—and it naturally grows out of "Place" because once parties decide where their message will reach voters (offline spaces, media, or digital platforms), they must decide how to present it there (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Lilleker, 2015). Earlier, promotion was almost entirely offline: political parties relied on street-corner meetings, nukkad sabhas, wall posters, handbills, loudspeaker announcements, film-song-based jingles, and large gatherings like the rallies of Indira Gandhi or N.T. Rama Rao. As television entered the Indian household in the 1980s–90s, promotion shifted to mass media, giving rise to televised speeches and symbolic ads like the BJP's 1991 "Ram Rath" visuals or Congress's emotional 2004 "Aam Aadmi" campaign (Norris, 2000; Singh, 2019). However, once the "Place" of political messaging shifted to digital spaces—Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and X—the nature of promotion dramatically changed (India's Center for Journalism, 2019; KAS, 2019; Mozilla Foundation, 2024; Time Magazine, 2019). The 2014 and 2019 BJP campaign with Modi as the main face is landmark example. In these campaigns BJP used data-driven promotion techniques along with WhatsApp groups and targeted ads. "Chai Pe Charcha" live sessions helped in targeting different voter groups (Pal, 2015; Pal, 2017; Singh, 2019). In 2020, AAP's Delhi campaign used micro-videos on TikTok and hyperlocal WhatsApp messages tailored to specific colonies, showing how "Promotion" now adapts to digital "Places" (Siddarth et al., 2021). With the rise of AI, political promotion has taken yet another leap. Parties can now generate thousands of customised posters, slogans, and videos using AI tools; analyse voter emotions in real time; and deliver micro-targeted promotions to specific castes, age groups, or even neighbourhoods (Dhanuraj & Nair, 2024; Islam et al., 2024; Kar Singh et al., 2024). AI-generated avatars of political leaders are being used to deliver speeches in multiple languages simultaneously—BJP's 2024 campaign experimented with Modi's AI-generated multi-language messages, while DMK used AI to recreate the voice and style of former leader Karunanidhi to address younger voters (Barik, 2024; Islam et al., 2024). But this powerful new promotional tool has also brought serious risks. During the 2024 Lok Sabha election, deepfake

videos of Home Minister Amit Shah were circulated on social media, manipulating his speech to make it appear as if he supported unpopular caste-based changes; Delhi Police confirmed it was a deepfake created using AI (Livemint, 2024; Republic TV, 2024). Similarly, fake AI-cloned voices of Bollywood actor Aamir Khan and political leaders like Manoj Tiwari were used during the campaign to spread misleading messages (New Indian Express, 2024; Reuters, 2024). In another incident, an AI-generated video falsely showing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi urging people not to vote caused confusion until fact-checkers intervened (Alt News, 2025; Islam et al., 2024).

The following incidents underscore how AI has made political promotion more targeted and efficient, but on the other hand, paved the way for easy manipulation and misinformation, such as deepfakes, and AI-generated posters or information that are inaccurate and misguide the public. This is how promotion, which is one of the most important marketing tool, has evolved from a simple one-way broadcast to technologically driven techniques, which, once misused, can work against a particular leader, party, or institution

DISCUSSION

The relevance of marketing strategies, often considered limited to the field of business, extends to the political marketing landscape. Politics and marketing, when discussed, may not sound idealistic, but both disciplines complement each other well. The majority of rational voters are aware of the fact that any political party may come into power, the basic problems, such as scams and corruption, will still exist, so the competition between political parties to lure such voters is dependent on how well they market themselves to be better than their counterparts. The sad reality of politics for the public is that “Justice becomes the byproduct of this electoral competition,” whereas it should be the aim of both the ruling party and the opposition to work together and work for the nation, not merely just to win this electoral battle.

Comparing the marketing mix with the political elements helps us better understand the relevance of marketing in politics. The 4 P’s of Marketing have their relevance in the political context, as Product in the political context will be the Leader or a party that promises to be the solution for a particular problem, for which the “Price” they have to pay, which is in the form of vote, which the individuals cast in favour of those leaders or parties whom they see as their potential solution to the problem. For any business, it is important

to find the best possible distribution system through which the product reaches the consumers, similarly in politics not all individuals are same and it is important for the political parties to segment the population and target them accordingly with the best possible method whether it is door to door campaigns, cold calling, using social media platforms, or running ads. This illustrates the significance of “Place” of the marketing mix in the context of politics. Lastly, one of the most popular forms of circulating information and attracting people is through “Promotions.” In politics, promotions have evolved from door-to-door campaigns to the use of sophisticated technology and analytics to gain an edge over their competitors. The relevance of Political marketing poses a promising scope for further research, as not much has been published on this theme.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND AI IN MODERN POLITICS

Social media, home to millions of users worldwide, provides a promising scope for businesses as well as political parties to make use of this user base to spread their message, ideas, or even promote themselves. Social media influencers are not shy of Indian politics, as we see a lot of famous YouTubers or influencers transitioning their careers towards a more politically centric content. Indian democracy stands for free speech, which is one of the most important pillars of any *democracy* (Constitution of India, Article 19). But there have been incidents where the same provision of free speech is used to selectively manipulate the voters and the public. It is normal for individuals to pick a side in politics as per their views or ideologies, but some of the social media influencers make use of their large audience to run a particular propaganda (Rathi, 2024; Observer Research Foundation, 2023). *The whole image of fake neutrality carried by such influencers is a threat to society, as they invoke anger based on their selective criticism backed by their image of being neutral.* Social media has become one of the strongest tools for promotion in modern politics, and if misused, it can lead to severe communal disturbance (Bose & Scroll.in, 2023). Hence, it raises concerns about regulating such content that lacks credibility.

As discussed above, AI technology, when misused, has adversely affected the electoral campaigns of many leaders and political parties (ECI Advisory, 2023). AI can be easily used to create false propaganda, whether targeting the government or any other leader. It is the responsibility of the

election commission to make sure that fake AI-generated videos or baseless propaganda, which are purposefully launched to mislead the voters, do not hamper the fair electoral coemption. The Election Commission of India even issued an advisory to all political parties and their representatives, not to indulge in such malpractices of creating deep fakes or other false content (Election Commission of India, 2023). Provisions of the Indian Penal Code (now replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita), such as Sections 336, 354–357, and those dealing with forgery, identity manipulation, and defamation, apply when a deepfake harms a person’s reputation or deliberately spreads misinformation (BNS, 2023). The Information Technology Act, 2000, is currently the main digital-era legislation — Sections 66D and 66E deal with impersonation and privacy violation (IT Act, 2000). Though there are rules and regulations governing this issue, a more robust implementation system is required to ensure a free and fair competition.

CONCLUSION

Political marketing has undergone a significant transformation since the shift from traditional and physically locative approaches to more digitized and AI-based approaches. The classical marketing mix can be applied to the political world and this presents a good means of understanding how parties can build political brands, attract voters and do so in a manner that determines their success or failure with regard to elections. Their leaders and ideologies become the products, the trust of the voter is the price, the redefining of the place by the digital ecosystems, and the transformation of the political promotion by AI. Meanwhile, political agendas have been delivered to voters through the digital platform with ease and have been able to make their messaging personal and also function within the high-velocity information spaces. Nevertheless, the new development has proven hazardous, such as artificial intelligence-born misinformation, deepfake videos, and algorithmically-generated content, which is a significant threat to democratic procedures that are reasonably fair.

Political marketing, indeed, is an inevitable part of any political campaign due to the increased competition amongst political parties, followed by easy access to advanced technology, but along with these advancements, responsibility and accountability will also increase as proper standards and regulations must be placed to monitor the proceedings, ensuring that there is no misuse of the technology or creation of false agendas. Ultimately, both

business institutions as well as political institutions have their responsibility towards society by resolving the issues and providing the customers or the voters the value for the price they pay, whether it is through money or in the form of votes. “Political Marketing” still remains very much an uncharted territory on which there is a requirement for more research to be done in the near future, highlighting the integration of both disciplines, i.e., marketing and politics, underscoring the relevance of marketing frameworks in politics, and how the political parties and leaders are transitioning from being merely just a political institution or individual to a proper brand which requires to be managed accordingly, thereby protecting and improving its brand equity.

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China's Hydro Hegemony and Strategic Contestation over the Brahmaputra River Basin

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Brahmaputra river, one of Asia's significant transboundary rivers, as an emerging site of geopolitical contention between China and India in South Asia. The study examines how the river, which is vital to the environment and humanity, has become a contested resource marked by major power asymmetries and the absence of hydro diplomacy among the riparian countries. The study also examines how China's constant upstream unilateral activities increase strategic competition between China and the lower riparian countries, especially, India. China's strategic move and the responses by the lower riparian countries define the issues of hydro politics in the Brahmaputra basin. The study argues China as a hydro-hegemon in terms of how it links water politics to border disputes, security and also by its dominance in hydro infrastructure vis-a-vis the riparian countries. By linking their strategic interest with the -Brahmaputra River, China largely determines the hydro-political issues with the riparian countries. India's responses are largely influenced by major concerns that vary from environmental issues, water scarcity to geopolitical issues. The study recommends a need for hydro diplomacy with a shift from water security to cooperative inter-governmental water governance.

Keywords: India, China, Brahmaputra River Basin, Hydro Diplomacy, Hydro Politics, Hydro Hegemony, Geopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

Rivers have been a vital to human civilization throughout history, a source of living, drinking water, transportation, development, food, and sustaining agriculture and irrigation till date. With 40% of the population dependent on the transboundary rivers, crossing national sovereign boundaries, they become transboundary rivers, bringing both opportunities and challenges for their riparian states (Braga, 2014). A transboundary river is defined as a river

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whose freshwater is shared by two or more riparian countries through which it flows, in which the actions of one country can affect the water politics, hydrology, and use of the river water by other countries (Wolf A. T., 1999). Approximately 90% of the world's population shares transboundary water resources (rivers, lakes, and aquifers), and due to the growing scarcity of water worldwide, disparities in water flow among riparians have become a growing concern among countries (Gokcekus & Bolouri, 2023). The rivers with various uses, provides fresh water for sustenance, followed by water used for industrial purposes, irrigation and agricultural, domestic, and, mostly, the contemporary demands of hydro power generation used in multiple sectors (Kibaroglu, Wolfrum, Kirschner, & Mehring, 2013). In addition to their economic and ecological roles, transboundary rivers are strategically and politically significant. The power dynamics between the riparian states can be affected by control over transboundary water resources, particularly when water is scarce or distributed unevenly. A transboundary river's political aspect, sometimes known as hydro politics, results from the interaction of regional power disparities, national security, and water scarcity. The ability of upper riparian nations to regulate the river's flow rate and frequency gives them considerable influence over their lower riparian neighbours. This upstream advantage, which is essentially a phenomenon that can be observed globally in various transboundary agreements, can be leveraged by riparian states to negotiate broader political or economic concerns beyond water issues. This upstream advantage, which is essentially a phenomenon observable internationally in various transboundary river basins, can be leveraged by riparian states to negotiate larger political or economic concerns beyond water (Wolf A. T., 2007). The concept of hydro-hegemony highlights how upper riparian states utilize their dominance over water resources to enhance their political and economic leverage (Warner, Mirumachi, Farnum, Grandi, Menga & Zeitoun, 2017). The collaboration and stability of the riparian states can be significantly impacted by the strategic management of any transboundary river. Through the building of dams, water diversion, or hydroelectric projects, the upper riparian frequently has significant influence over its lower riparian. However, in order to safeguard their water security, lower riparian argue for equitable water sharing or seek international attention.

The works on the transboundary water issues and riparian contestation are often rooted in the country's national interest, environmental issues and

governmental challenges, among which water distribution and flow come first. However, environmental and ecological issues make the management of transboundary rivers even more difficult where both upper and lower riparian countries are influenced by climate change, which also intensifies water scarcity, flooding, and disrupts hydrological cycles globally. Apart from these issues, lower riparians also come across various forms of pollution (industrial, mining, etc), altering the quality of fresh water and posing transboundary environmental hazards.

Transboundary water resources are a zone for contestation, but they also offer opportunities for cooperation in the area. The principle of equitable and reasonable utilisation seeks to balance the interests of all riparian states. However, the only concern that remains is the geopolitical disputes, lack of trust, national interest and unilateral interests of countries against its riparian countries (Wehling, 2020).

Transboundary rivers exemplify the intricate interplay between the environment, society, and politics. They are crucial for human survival, economic development of a country, and ecological balance, yet they also present complex challenges due to competing national interests of the riparian states, environmental pressures, and governance gaps. The transboundary rivers require a multidisciplinary approach and effective management based on cooperation, trust, and adherence to international legal norms by the riparian states. As pressures on water resources deepen globally, the governance of transboundary rivers will gradually determine regional stability, ecological resilience, and human well-being, making them central in the 21st century.

HYDRO-POLITICS AND TRANSBOUNDARY RIVERS

Water is increasingly seen as a 'power', a 'weapon', and there is a growing securitisation of water. It is speculated that petrostates with abundant natural resources, such as hydropower potential, will encounter both intra-state and inter-state issues and conflict, particularly because the idea of energy sources is becoming more and more intertwined with the developmental concept for the states in the international arena. With the target of most states to decarbonise by a specific year of their own, the pressure on water to become the new fuel for development, industrial and economic growth of a state has become vital. As Ismail Serageldin suggested in 1995, "the war of the next century will be about water" (Sovacool & Walter, 2018). It has also

been stated that water has become the most used, extracted, and employed resource in the world. While the water conflict is generally related to border, economy, and national interests of any country (Chellaney, 2014). The concern for water security is gaining more attention over the years now, and it is generally defined as having an acceptable quality and quantity of fresh water for general use by humans, and also an acceptable amount of water related concerns to the environment, humans and economy (Pak, 2016).

In the contemporary era, water, particularly transboundary water, has become a highly contested issue between sovereign states. Transboundary rivers, not only for the importance of their hydropower potential, but also for geopolitical, social, and economic aspects, act both as a prospect for cooperation as well as conflict between the riparian states (Manhas & Yadav, 2024). Internationally, 60 per cent of the fresh water is transboundary in nature, and almost 150 countries globally share this transboundary water, making it political in nature. However, most of the issues among the countries are related to transboundary waters as they hold immense potential for a sovereign country (Keskinen, Hakkinen, Haapala, & Sharipova, 2023). Nevertheless, sharing such a resource is equivalent to sharing power, economy, and national interest. Similarly, it has been noted by many scholars that such transboundary issues lead to the study of hydro-politics, and similarly, it has been observed that with hydro diplomacy, these conflicts and issues can be lessened or may act as a catalyst for cooperation between the riparian countries.

THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER BASIN AS A SITE OF CONTESTATION

A striking example of hydro-politics amongst the transboundary rivers is the Brahmaputra River in South Asia, which originates in China's Tibet Autonomous Region, flows through India's Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, and finally enters Bangladesh. Chinese construction of hydropower dams and water diversion projects has raised concerns in the lower riparian, India and Bangladesh about potential hazards of the flow of the water, flood risks, and ecological damage. The Brahmaputra River is one of the most important transboundary rivers of the world. Having its origin in the Tibet Autonomous Region (China), this region of origin itself and the river serve as a lifeline to all the riparian population. It flows through four countries: China, India, Bhutan, and Bangladesh (Manhas & Yadav, 2024). Originating in the

Himalayan ranges, it flows towards the southern region of China, making way to enter the eastern region of India, then enters Bangladesh and, finally emptying itself in the Bay of Bengal (Nepal & Shrestha, 2015). The place of its origin has an elevation of 5300m with a total length of the basin of 2880km (Dutta, Hinge, Marak, & Sharma, 2021).

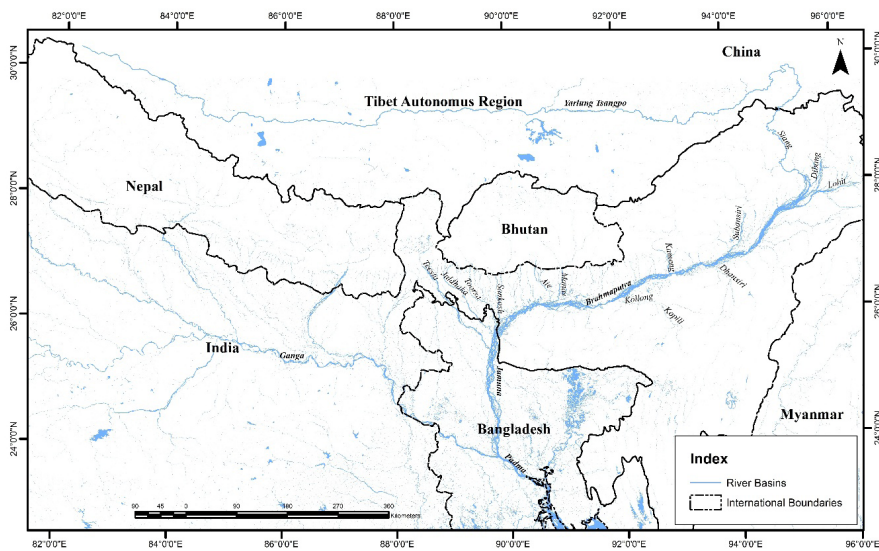


Figure 1: Map prepared by using ArcGIS, showing the Brahmaputra River Basin.

China's Medog Hydropower project, sanctioned in December 2024 and started construction in mid-2025, has been stated to become the world's largest and a major hydropower project, with a capacity of 60 GW and a predicted annual production of 300 billion kWh, perhaps three times more than the Three Gorges Dam (Zhang, 2025). The large-scale project has evoked fears in the Indian government, with internal government assessments warning it could limit and control the river flow in the lower riparians during the dry and monsoon seasons, potentially enabling water to be used as geopolitical leverage (Master & Shen, 2025). Ever since Chinese upstream hydro activity has inversely affected lower riparian states, India's diplomatic active response has included calls for transparency and reviving seasonal MoUs on hydrological data sharing agreements, which, since their initiation in 2002, have been on the edge and irregular in their continuity. In fact, hydrological data sharing was suspended amid rising bilateral tensions in 2023, and even

these simple forms of cooperation made India sceptical of the Chinese hydro activities in the river basin and a greater threat to itself.

The River Brahmaputra has been and will in the future be used by both countries to influence the geopolitics of South Asia. India sees China's massive hydro infrastructural expansion along the upper Yarlung Tsangpo like Zangmu Dam, Jiacha Dam, the Three Gorges Dam and, now the massive Medog dam (other minor construction is always active), as a geopolitical move. India's deployment of military troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang, Walong, and Upper Siang can be seen as dictated by this geopolitical consideration, where control over these critical regions becomes necessary for border surveillance and strategic concerns. India, being situated between China and Bangladesh, holds a peculiar position in the Brahmaputra River Basin of a middle riparian country, making it a vital player in the river geopolitics (Pandit, 2022). The relationship between the two upper riparian countries of the Brahmaputra shares a critical issue due to their border and the contested regions. India is also responding with hydro infrastructure constructions in its northeast states of approximately 14,069 megawatts, of which 14 are to be in Arunachal Pradesh and the largest one being the Etalin hydropower project, Lower Siang project, and Demwe Lower project of 3,097 MW, 2,700 MW, and 1,750 MW respectively. However, the proposed Subansiri Hydroelectric project and Siang Project have been opposed by the locals of the state in the dam building, will now be commissioned in May 2026 (Baruah, Barua, & Vij, 2022).

China's upstream activities also affect the livelihood and security of the northeastern states of India, where these regions depend severely on the river water for agricultural purposes, fisheries, irrigational uses, hydropower generation, and social and cultural aspects. India's strategic concern rises from the region's vulnerability, where a fragile ecological balance and limited infrastructure make the Northeast highly sensitive to any upstream alteration by China, and the region's social and cultural beliefs, porous borders, and economic underdevelopment create further challenges. Though China claims that the hydropower dams as a run-of-the-river projects, which doesn't allow the storage of large volumes of water, causing the alteration in the flow of the river and the water, India is still sceptical because there is a potential for manipulating the flow quantity during critical agricultural necessities or flooding periods, also due to its close proximity and China's claims of

sovereignty over contested areas.

Extensive infrastructure development in the Tibet region, with rapid troop deployment near the LAC, creates geopolitical concerns for India, which can be interpreted as hydrological and defence infrastructure as part of a broader strategy to dominate South Asia in the future through resource capture and geopolitical advantage.

Being neighbours, interdependence and trust are necessary elements in transboundary water sharing, but the management of the transboundary river basin remains ineffective between India and China. The problem and issue lie in the management of the river basin. Agriculture is one of the vital sectors in the basin economy, where almost 60 per cent of the total national water is consumed in agricultural production. The river sustains every living being and the huge biodiversity throughout its river basin, yet cooperation between China and India remains limited to a provisional hydrological data sharing, where there are only limited notifications and the absence of a basic permanent governance institution for the Brahmaputra River.

CHINA'S HYDRO-HEGEMONY AND STRATEGIC INTEREST IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER BASIN

The politics of the Brahmaputra River, among the transboundary rivers in Asia, exposes how a natural resource has become deeply entangled with questions of sovereignty, security, and regional order. In International Relations, 'hegemony' is not verbally used by countries, but can be seen using it in various forms in dealing with one another. It is a concept used in describing dominance (negatively) or leadership (positively). Hegemony in earlier decades was used in a form of force, basically in a form of military and war, but in the contemporary era, other forms of hegemony, like diplomacy, soft power, and ideas, are used (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006).

Hydro-hegemony is linked with water power politics. Hydro-hegemony occurs when water from one sovereign country crosses the international border and enters another sovereign country, making the transboundary river a political tool or a political issue, making it a source of dispute and disagreement. It is a term used to describe a powerful country in regard to its management, control, and position in the transboundary river (Warner, et al., 2017). Power is an instrument of hegemony, and three types of power can be classified according to Zeitoun and Warner in the realm of transboundary

water resources. The first one classifies itself with shared power with the riparian countries, where some form of cooperation or complete cooperation exists. The second kind is a consolidated or combined one, which explains when two riparian countries share a moderate form of cooperation where both countries have equal amounts of power relations, and here the level of competition is less but probable. However, the third one is contested, where the relationship between the riparian countries is aggressive and competitive at the same time, and cooperation is zero, backed by trust issues and security concerns (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006).

The major features of a hydro-hegemon are its riparian position, its power position in comparison with the riparian countries, and the potential exploitation of the water resources from the transboundary rivers (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). Perhaps, the nature of the issues of water and water conflict is also greatly defined by the hydro-hegemon state. Hydro-hegemon is a powerful status in the international arena, and this position not only gives the power to control and manage the transboundary river, but it also lets the hegemon enjoy the powerful status whereby its co-riparian, who might as well be equally powerful, needs to be submissive in matters of transboundary water resources.

Hydro-hegemony is a diplomatic tool to identify the issue in the relationship of the riparian countries. It helps to identify the hidden politics of water related issues and conflicts where there exists power asymmetry among the riparian countries. Hydro-hegemony acts as a lens for understanding how power and water politics function. The upper riparian (hydro-hegemon) always tends to shape the politics of the transboundary basin and its riparian countries. However, the lower riparian countries are left to adapt and seek cooperation in the riparian basin, which either never works or is very slow in the process (Arynova, 2019). According to scholars such as Frederick Frey (1993) have earlier argued that in a riparian relationship decision making is one of the major elements that is generally taken up by the hegemon. However, among the riparian countries, chances of cooperation and stable relations are generally low if the hegemon is an upper riparian whereas chances are probably high when the hegemon is situated in as a lower riparian country where the need and interests meets (Vij, 2025).

Chinese position as an upper most riparian to the basin gives it an inherent hydrological advantage, which has been systematically and strategically

reinforced through large-scale infrastructural hydro power projects in the basin. Beijing has ever since pursued an ambitious dam-building agenda under its development and national interest, aimed at accelerating economic growth and integrating it with tackling water issues of its population. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam and Zangmu Dam, after many small-scale dams, operational since 2003 and 2015 respectively, marked large-scale hydropower station on the Yarlung Tsangpo by the Chinese government and marked the foundation of a broader hydropower strategy, which further combines its control and management over the river in its upper sovereign regions. The most controversial, however, is the proposed Medog hydropower project, fairly to be operational around 2030's is the world's largest hydropower project, which aims to generate approximately 60 gigawatts of electricity, nearly double the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam (Janos, J., Bogardi, Salame, Nooijen, Kumar, Tingsanchali, Bahaduri & Kolechkina, 2021).

China, as the upper riparian, occupies an advantage in controlling the flow of the Brahmaputra due to its position, and this asymmetry in its position allows China to exercise its hegemony over India and Bangladesh. China practices a form of strategic veil by constructing mega hydro dams and hydro projects without fully disclosing its scope (Shanta, 2018). For India, this asymmetry in riparian position develops deep insecurity, while China regularly reassures that all its dams are run-of-the-river and that the water is not stored or hinders the flow of the river water. India, however, perceives them as potential tools for future leverage and power over its riparian states.

The two billion population of South and Southeast Asia is dependent on the rivers originating from Tibet which gives China an upper hand in Asia's water security. China, with its serious water crisis, has been making ways to sustain its water needs for various purposes in many ways, like building hydro power infrastructures and by diverting river waters. This has caused its riparian states to have serious water concerns and can potentially create a water crisis in its lower riparian states.

China's upstream activities are catalysing India's concern over the Brahmaputra River Basin. While the growing hydrological, military, economic, and infrastructural presence of China near the border regions has raised concerns for India. Water concerns have become part of India's broader strategic contention with China. Although water remains a sensitive topic, it is increasingly present in India's strategic narrative about China. In 2020,

the Chinese government officially announced plans to construct a massive hydropower project at Medog County in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, near the Great Bend of the Yarlung Tsangpo, Brahmaputra (Giordano & Wahal, 2023). This announcement had immediately elevated tension and pressure between India and China. The announcement of its construction in July 2025 has raised a wave of panic in India, not just because of the project's size, which is believed to surpass even the Three Gorges Dam by three times, but also because of its proximity to the border region of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as "South Tibet".

The Medog dam proposal has since become a turning point in India's strategic rethinking for transboundary governance, regional security, and foreign policy. The proposed Medog dam is situated just before Yarlung Tsangpo takes a U-shaped sharp turn around the Namcha Barwa (India) range and enters India as the Siang River, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra (Manhas & Yadav, 2024). This region is geographically significant for many reasons. Firstly, it is in close proximity to the Indian border with China, which raises security concerns. Secondly, as the dam is the closest to the region when it enters Northeast India, the Chinese government will have full leverage over the river on how and of what quantity it enters the Indian territory. Lastly, being in a critical seismic zone over the Himalayas, China's construction of enormous hydro infrastructures within its country will have a significant impact on its neighbours in an environmental sense, raising concerns for a natural disaster to occur, which is due to the anthropogenic activities.

The Global Times (Chinese media) in 2020 described the Medog project as part of China's national energy security strategy and a leap towards green, sustainable development. However, Indian scholars interpreted this differently as a potential tool of leverage that could weaponize water and hinder the flow to India's disadvantage. Apart from clean energy, employment opportunities, and infrastructure, what are the drawbacks that the world's largest dam in a fragile region will bring to the host country, along with its neighbours, is what the international concern lies in. Economic benefits and green sustainable development are not just what China is looking forward to; perhaps a balance in its hydro-power and unilateral management is what China's hidden objectives could possibly be.

The effects of the Three Gorges Dam hampered the rotation of the Earth. However, the Medog Dam, when completed, will generate and replace the

Three Gorges Dam with thrice as much energy from the station, which is more than the annual power output of Britain (Chen, 2025).

INDIA'S CONCERNS AND THE STRATEGIC RESPONSES

India has now been concerning deeply regarding China's interest in the Brahmaputra River Basin. The fear of losing the volume and water quality from the river deeply disturbs India, concerning about is population as well as highlighting the contribution of Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh. The major concern of India over Chinese activities on the river is weaponization of the transboundary river to gain leverage on the conflict, particularly the one that is geopolitical in nature. This leverage and control threaten the socio-economic stability of the lower riparian states.

The issue of environmental challenges in the lower riparian zone escalates with growing Chinese interest in the river basin. The construction of the hydropower infrastructure and the recent Medog dam greatly hampers the natural flow and the availability of the river water, which hinders the biodiversity and social patterns of India's northeast states. It also brings about water scarcity, seasonal drought, and flooding as well as issues in agricultural productivity in the lower riparian states.

India has not been able to manage a legally binding treaty with China on the Brahmaputra (like the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan, which lasted for more than 60 years amidst border conflicts and heavy issues of terrorist attacks). Its diplomatic approach is cautious, largely because India itself is hesitant to accept international mediation in transboundary water disputes. Therefore, in the suspicion over Chinese intentions, India has gradually planned to rely on its own monitoring capabilities, including satellite surveillance to track activities on its international borders, dam construction, and coastlines, where, among the total of 52 surveillance satellites, ISRO will manufacture 21 satellites, and 31 will be handled by the private companies. India seems sceptical of solely relying on Chinese-provided hydrological data as indecisive and risky, especially after the 2017 Doklam standoff when Beijing suspended hydrological data-sharing (Vishwanath, 2018). The Indian government is striving for technical independence in monitoring the hydro infrastructures and hydro activities on the Brahmaputra River basin.

India's most striking strategic response was to build dams of its own on the Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh by establishing hydropower projects,

and to strengthen its legal and political claim to the river. However, India claims that if it does not use the water flows for its national interest, then it might strengthen China's leverage more in the basin and therefore, by constructing hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh, India's strategic reactions will show that it will not passively accept China's dominance. India also increasingly perceives the river not just as a transboundary issue but as part of the larger India-China bilateral relations, which are inversely related to each other, where primarily water and sovereignty are interlinked in India's geopolitics. India identifies China's hydropower dam construction as a matter of concern, for transparency and ecological risk to the lower riparian, emphasising laws from the UN Watercourses Convention (1997), such as Equitable and reasonable utilization and participation, not to cause significant harm to the riparian states, regular exchange of data and information and Protection and preservation of ecosystems and prevention, reduction and control of pollution (Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses, 1997). This is how India disapproves of China's unilateralism in the river basin without directly internationalising the open dispute, just so as to generally avoid its own flaws of not signing to any international law on the Brahmaputra River Basin.

Despite India's concerns over Chinese activities in the upstream, India's official response is often restrained to avoid escalating the water issue into open conflict with China, as the Brahmaputra dispute is deeply intertwined with the border issue between the two countries, and it claims that being forceful in the matter might provoke China to accelerate diversion projects and new projects as a counter effect. India's preference is to keep water dialogue within the broader framework of India-China relations rather than isolating it as a separate dispute which might never find its way to cooperation.

In the past decades or colonial times, dams were constructed for the reason of security in an increasingly populated country. It served an optimistic purpose of water storage and use to the host country, with less hindrance in the flow of the transboundary river to the riparian countries. Dams do bring about security in food and water to the population, but at the same time, they cause harm to the same population through environmental issues. India has spent about rupees 400,000 crores on dam building, and nearly 40 per cent of the budget is used for the Water Resource Department on dam maintenance (Pradhan & Srinivasan, 2022). National interest and the needs of a country allow management and governance of the flowing transboundary river within

its sovereign land, however, the same activities by the riparian country seem disturbing and a concern for others. The activities of the upper riparian are judged by how they communicate to the riparian countries, whether it uses force or diplomacy. The same activity can be portrayed as a dominance and cooperative riparian, with just how the country uses its communications method in dealing with its riparian countries.

Indian government have claimed that China, apart from controlling the flow of the river have also used it as a political tool against India. Instead of having a fair share of the river water by the riparian states China is ignorant of the problem faced by other riparian countries because of China affecting many factors downstream mainly agricultural sector and industrial sector followed by the result of flood more than China building hydro power infrastructures (Afzal, Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2020). India's concern is dynamic in nature with upper riparian China's activities in the Brahmaputra River basin. From environment to biodiversity, climate change to water scarcity, social livelihood to economic stability, and majorly geopolitical interests to security issues with the Brahmaputra River.

LIMITATIONS OF HYDRO DIPLOMACY BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA

Hydro diplomacy can be broadly defined as a political process that uses water related knowledge and diplomatic instruments at various levels of diplomatic tracks to simultaneously reduce water related tensions and promote constructive interactions between transboundary riparian countries, allowing it to possibly view hydro diplomacy as a process which introduces hydro-politics and diplomacy in International Relations and also uses diplomacy and foreign policy as a tool for managing the relation between the riparian countries (Keskinen, et al., 2023). Schmeier defined water diplomacy as “the use of diplomatic instruments to existing or emerging disagreements and conflicts over shared water resources with the aim to solve or mitigate those for the sake of cooperation, regional stability, and peace” (Schmeier, 2018).

In a transboundary basin, hydro diplomacy looks at the holistic interests of all the riparian states and not just the interests of the hydro hegemon. Not doing so have and will cause issues and less chances of cooperation and trust building among the riparian states (Gokcekus & Bolouri, 2023). Hydro-diplomacy offers diplomatic relations and is not about force, where it is used as a tool or an instrument to emphasize problem-solving, decoding

disagreements and conflicts. Hydro diplomacy is also a term used to describe various aspects of transboundary waters, like water scarcity, water conflicts, and water cooperation. The term has also highlighted the challenges and governance related to water. China's water scarcity issues have been central, and water resource management has been implemented by the government since the 1990s, however, the issues are still severe (Jiang, 2009). This insecurity of China has led the government to make optimal use of every transboundary river that flows through its international border. While the Chinese government acts on the transboundary rivers in its own sovereign land, the lower riparian states face immediate repercussions. With a sense of insecurity and trust issues between the two countries, the element of hydro diplomacy and its objectives are not even near among its riparian states on the Brahmaputra River.

Hydro diplomacy between India and China tumbles amid China's infrastructural assertiveness, fragile hydrological data sharing, border issues, domestic political pressure, and the lack of robust institutional frameworks. Until these structural deficiencies are addressed, diplomacy remains restricted, sensitive, and conflicted. Thus, hydro diplomacy fails because negotiations take place in an environment of power mistrust, and China does not want to weaken its upstream advantage through binding agreements, while India resists entering frameworks that recognise Chinese dominance. This dynamic produces a stalemate rather than meaningful cooperation.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 1997 is mainly relevant in the Brahmaputra case because it lays down core principles for governing the transboundary rivers and water, the major ones are from Part II Article 5- 'Equitable and reasonable utilisation and participation' (all riparian states should use shared rivers fairly and sustainably, considering the needs of co-riparian states), Article 6- 'Factors relevant to equitable and reasonable utilization' (geographic, socio-economic needs, population dependents, conservation are to be considered), Article 7- 'Obligation not to cause significant harm' (appropriate measures to prevent the instigating damage to other watercourse State), Article 9- 'Regular exchange of data and information', Part IV of Article 20- 'Protection and preservation of ecosystems' and Article 21- 'Prevention, reduction and control of pollution'. These principles, if adopted, could initiate the essence of cooperation and health of the Brahmaputra River Basin (Vinti, 2021).

The adoption of these laws in regulating the Brahmaputra River could serve as a platform for longstanding governance and diplomatic ties between India and China. Nevertheless, neither India nor China have been successful in ratifying the Convention themselves till date. Where China has always opposed to the bilateral or the multilateral regimes on transboundary rivers, and strictly claiming them as limitations to one's sovereignty and upstream rights to the flowing transboundary river. However, India might be concerned about equitable water sharing and use, but at the same time, India remains cautious about agreeing to the binding and obligatory transboundary laws and treaties. India restricts itself towards these bilateral and multilateral laws, which might later affect its own national interest related to water and hydro developments on the river Brahmaputra with China. This reflects how India and China are unwilling to participate in the shared cooperation and hydro diplomacy on the Brahmaputra issue.

CONCLUSION

The securitisation of water, where hydropower infrastructures and dam building on the Chinese side are perceived by India as less development initiatives and more as strategic instruments of leverage. China, a powerful player in the field of hydro infrastructures and the uppermost riparian in the Brahmaputra River basin, could bring about transformation in the hydro cooperation with its riparian countries. China perceives binding agreements as constraints on its sovereignty and upstream advantage on the basin. China's recent announcement of the Medong super dam has marked a milestone in the geopolitics of the Brahmaputra River Basin. As for India, these activities have resulted in more doubts and trust issues and have exposed the vulnerabilities of downstream dependence. While these rigid decisions and power balancing between India and China remain constrained by power asymmetry and diplomatic complexity, India is now determined that water concerns are a part of its strategy and diplomacy, not only as a transboundary resource to meet its national interests but also as a domain of geopolitical contestation and national resilience which needs attention.

China's dominant behaviour and upstream hydropower activities on the Brahmaputra River has forced a significant change in the direction of India's foreign policy towards China. Having initially attempted to initiate informal cooperation, temporary diplomacy, MoUs, and bilateral meetings, India has now shifted towards a more unilaterally structured and strategic approach to

transboundary water governance. With changing India's approach towards the Brahmaputra River management, a shift could be seen in the geopolitics of natural resources where rivers once seen as free flowing resources with less intervention, are now interlinked with concepts such as security, power disparity, sovereignty, national interest, environmental risks and so on. In response to Chinese upstream activity, the approach can be described as a mix of diplomatic considerations and infrastructural claims. On the one hand, India engages with China diplomatically through hydrological data sharing and probable bilateral talks over hydropower infrastructures, but maintains a distance from the binding treaties due to its own sovereignty concerns and autonomy over the river basin. India employs a balancing strategy, expanding its own hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh. This initiative aims to counter the threats posed by China's mega dams, promising development and security in the northeastern region, while enhancing surveillance and data independence, and strengthening downstream ties with Bangladesh. In this regard, India's strategy is reactive and defensive rather than what it really portrays, which is cooperation, where it seeks to counter against China's upstream leverage rather than resolving the mistrust between the two countries, which explains why hydro diplomacy remains negligible, and because of this Brahmaputra River continues to function as a strategic faultline rather than a boost for cooperation.

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BOOK REVIEW

**Gujarat Riots: The True Story, M.D. Deshpande (2022), Second Edition.
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Writing on Communal violence is no less than a slippery path, despite digging into the real story. These Authors are generally assumed to have preconceived notions and be supporters of one or the other side by the reader. One of such crucial writings has been done by Deshpande on the Gujarat Riots, on the contention that the right story about the Gujarat Riots should be narrated. However, the Tehelka Tapes and News of March 2002 have claimed much about the ground story of the Gujarat Riots then the question arises what new Deshpande will narrate? If the Media especially Tehelka has shown the ground story of Gujarat riots. Is this book really worthwhile in understanding Gujarat Riot? Or it is no more than an ideologically motivated imposition of false narrative? These pessimistic questions may arise towards his writings when anyone listens about this work, but once the book is completed by that reader, his/her thoughts would become more critical towards each claim of truth made by Media / Sting operations of Tehelka. Deshpande has been a Student of Computer Science and Engineering, famous for his objective and factual Political writings in India. “Gujarat Riots: The True Story” is one such work that Deshpande wrote at the age of 18 in 2008. The Impact of this teenager is reflected in his words, charged with the emotional underpinnings. Systematic arrangement of 13 chapters with suitable titles, this book develops critical understanding towards news and story served to the reader on Gujarat Riots. Using different media sources and committee reports author has tried to dig a real and full story on the Gujarat riots through cross verification and linking one story to another. The author, Deshpande has started his story from the very past, searching for the reason behind the communal violence in India. This survey of the past and findings of Deshpande is thought-provoking for those who take an instrumental view of communal violence and generally accuse V.H.P. (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) and BJP as their strategy of electoral gain.

The first Chapter of the Book is titled as “History of Attacks on India”. This Chapter of the book traces the History of attacks and their impacts on the lives of Hindus. Especially medieval attacks led by the Arabs to better explain the present condition of Indian society. According to Deshpande, 634 AD marks the first Arab attack led to transition of peaceful Indian society to aggressive design. This whole Chapter is written to give a factual account of attacks made by Muslims on Hindus as invaders, rulers for strengthening their interest from time to time. The next chapter titled “The Godhra Carnage” not only discusses about Godhra massacre but also provides full -fledged account of riots taken in Godhra from 1928 to 2003 on different reason either its partition of 1948 or 2003 stone pelting by Minority on Ganesh idol immersion. Using newspaper headlines as well as historical accounts author has depicted that Godhra 2002 is not the first riots between Hindu and Muslims of Godhra but have a long history of bloody riots in Godhra. Further in this chapter has discusses about torching of 58 Karsevaks, who were returning from Ayodhya in Ahmedabad bound Sabarmati Express. Discussing what and how about the brutal fate of Ahmedabad bound Sabarmati Express, Deshpande has given equal importance to the experience of Survivors of Godhra Massacre as well as reporting of English media. This chapter also focusses on How media worked as opponent to dead Karsevaks by dehumanizing them and blaming them and VHP for their own end.

In Chapter Third Titled as “Role of the Government in Controlling Violence”, through the Comparative study of News printed by especially The Hindu, The Times of India and even anti- Modi/BJP Journals, Deshpande has given a clear account of roles played by Gujarat Government after Godhra in 2002. Chapter Four gives a historical account of bloody riots which happened in Gujarat on very minute reasons for example as this chapter claim that, the first communal riot that occurred in 1714 was due to mismanagement of Gulal on the eve of Holi. Through this account of bloody riots author has replied to those who alleges VHP and RSS affiliates as instigator of communal riots, especially of 2002, that their allegations especially on Gujarat is not more than a narrative created and whitewashed by media and Congress to defame Gujarat and VHP because before the existence of RSS and BJP there was no a smaller number of communal riots.

Chapter 5 titled as “Attacks on Hindus”, this Chapter provides the story of the other side which has been strategically ignored/suppressed by English Media either Electronic or Print. Chapter 6, discusses as title suggests “Attacks

on Muslims”. With the discussion of casualties of the community, Deshpande has tried to problematize the narrative that it was a State Sponsored ‘Program/Genocide’ against the Muslim minority on the contention if it would have been State Sponsored one-way Program then no Hindu would have been shot for saving minorities or no minorities would had enough dare to launch attack on Hindus from 1 March 2002. After discussing these backgrounds, Deshpande in chapter seven of this book, titled under “Concocted Lies and Myths and The Facts”, has discussed 21 major myths about Gujarat riots which Media and other anti-BJP/Modi had been projecting since 2002 until 2022. This chapter mentions all those 21 Myths and debunks them on the basis of facts either provided in SIT report/Comparative analysis of one or other News Paper.

Chapter 8 titled as “contrast between 1984 and Gujarat riots” Deshpande has taken a critical and objective understanding to find the difference between 1984 anti-Sikh riots and 2002 Gujarat riots. Deshpande has applied his reasoning to argue that how congress government became blind and forgot Godhra while making statements against Gujarat Government as in the past in 1984, Only one killing of Indira Gandhi that also from two terrorist led huge massacre of Sikhs and not a single congress person either in Delhi or else in India was arrested. In contrast to that from the very first day Gujarat government started taking action to curb riot by preventive arrest and through the order of shoot at sight. The figure of arrested Hindus was thrice than Muslims. Chapter 9 titled as “Role of the Rivals and Media in Instigating Violence” Deshpande’s research on Godhra has been based on Media and different report especially SIT. But he had not even spared Media for its Minority appeasing attitude and Congress involvement in instigating violence especially when normalcy was declared in Gujarat. Chapter 10 titled as “Some Courts Judgement”, this chapter reflects pragmatic reality of Judicial and Media organization which for their own career and profit advancement attach themselves to certain preconceived ideology. This Chapter of Deshpande discloses how hereditary and political loyalism effects the decision of Judges as well as news of Media.

When someone is promising for correct and real story and he forgets to Tehelka means he is just trying to impose another half and twisted truth. That has not been missed by Deshpande and he titled 11th chapter of his book as “TEHELKA LIES”. Revisiting the reports of Tehelka and its arguments, Deshpande has exposed that those sting operations which were

done, were at first against the privacy because these reporters met these people as writer on Hindu Nationalism and Secondly each exposed person has admitted that Modi arrived after Naroda Patiya killings, but facts and official records say that this is one of the blasted lies. After debunking Myths of TEHELKA, writer has tried to show the findings of SIT on major myths to support his objective claims in chapter 12 titled as “Findings of SIT”. This Chapter not only discusses SIT findings but also the bias and difficulties that R.K. Raghavan and his team faced. How Sanjiv Bhatt one of the IPS cadre officer’s claim was given more preference by the Amicus Curiae and Raju Ramchandran than findings of SIT. The reason behind such a tendency, which Deshpande has reflected, is Amicus Curiae and Raju Ramchandran’s anti-Modi preconception and affiliation to the left Media.

Last but not least, after discussing and debunking myths related to Gujarat riots, it becomes general curiosity to find the cause behind these lies. Understanding this Deshpande has titled his last chapter as “The Causes of Lies”, author through various examples either its reaction of Indian Muslims on “Danish Cartoon” or no criticism of Afghanistan’s Death Penalty on the conversion from Islam to Christianity has convicted Pseudo- Secular thinking for step motherly behavior of Media and Congress and its allies towards Hindu causes. Deshpande has charged pseudo-secularists of contempt of tradition, who remain slave of Colonial Mindset and even author himself has admitted that the same is being imparted to next generation of India. According to the author, unawareness about India’s ground history to intellectual classes as well influence of colonial policies has created a slippery slope which despite various efforts led further sustenance of colonial Mindset.

This work of Deshpande brings true story of Gujarat Riots by debunking approximately 21 major myths. This book is not only account of facts but also provides good instinct to think critically about what is served to you may be cooked truth rather than reality. Deshpande’s work over Gujarat riots is really truth-telling and balanced, but he also remains conservative to English Media and ignores the Vernaculars as trustworthy and insightful source for Gujarat. Even he had tried to show biasness of English media but remained very narrow in his approach without giving attention to either Editorials/ Edit page articles. Author has taken SIT report as one of parameter to cross verify others but in his own book’s chapter, either Chapter 10 titled as “Some Courts Judgement or chapter 12 titled as “Findings of SIT”, which has also reflected ideological underpinnings behind judgements and preconception of

Ramchandran Raju and others about Gujarat riots and involvement of Modi. In that context to maintain objectivity and quality of truth Author in each chapter at suitable places discussed the ideological underpinnings of that source he cited as well as even to prove impartiality of the R.K Raghavan and his team author argue that when SIT conducted research and survey that time rule was not of Narendra Modi's Party BJP but Congress, the opposition of BJP. This style of using oppositional source like outlook or other by Deshpande makes his story more real and objective. Deshpande has tried to reflect the causes of lies over Gujarat riots but he had constrained himself from giving solution to overcome the tendency of becoming more and more colonized.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Bharat Rising Dharma, Democracy, Diplomacy by Utpal Kumar is a very thought provoking, well researched and argumentative book which is majorly divided into two parts: first, dharma and democracy, second, democracy and diplomacy. One cannot agree more with Anu Lall when she says that “Everyone should read this book, irrespective of their political affiliations.”

The book primarily revolves around the efforts taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government in reclaiming the civilisational culture and heritage of Bharat leading to its transformation since 2014. The best part about this book is that it contains various excerpts from many other sources and it will make you read those other books too. It traces the journey of India from 1947 till the post 2014 period labelled as a “revolution in progress”. The author boldly claims that Bharat had a false start in 1947, now it is leaving behind the Nehruvian ethos and is looking at the west while making it crystal clear that agendas which don't suit Bharat will not be welcomed. The book is about how Bharat has transformed itself both internally and externally and has become much more confident and assertive with absence of any inferiority complex shaping the world and itself without being apologetic or underconfident about it. Many outstanding revelations are made in this book supported by facts.

The author criticises the left liberal intelligentsia for historical distortions in understanding of India's rich and diverse past and an insidious type of cultural and intellectual colonialism which Bharat continued to suffer from in the post-independence period. No wonder he has unapologetically used the restoration of temple in Ayodhya, Kashi Vishwanath, Kedar Nath, Ujjain as parts of a broader civilisational perspective while also criticising Nehruvian secularism which stemmed from his own aversion and disdain towards Hindus and their temples. His compelling arguments support the view that during the

Nehruvian era, a Muslim could remain a Muslim, a Christian could remain a Christian but a Hindu was expected to be totally secular in nature. One of the major strengths of the book lies in the fact that almost every argument in it is substantiated by excerpts from diverse and credible references, and it is also written in a very simple, lucid, easy to understand language, avoiding the use of any heavy jargons which enhances its readability.

The book also launches an attack on the power-hungry elites of Lutyens's Delhi popularly referred to as "the khan market" group who owe their existence largely to the Nehru- Gandhi dynasty. They lived in sprawling bungalows, used private transport, went to private clubs, lived lives of luxury and also enjoyed various other privileges but publicly called themselves as socialists. Even during the era of prime ministers such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh, it was these Lutyens's Delhi elites who remained in power and ruled the country either directly or indirectly till 2014. Utpal Kumar has rightly referred to them as a residue of the philosophy of colonial rule. The author highlights that one cannot ignore the fact that PM Narendra Modi is the first leader since independence to dismantle and overthrow the stronghold of hierarchical and elitist Lutyens' Delhi over politics.

For me, one of the most compelling arguments of the book is contained in chapter titled : "Three Musketeers and the Nehruvian Tyranny" where the author provides ample evidence to suggest that the outstanding contributions of the three legends of Indian history namely : Veer Savarkar, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and B.R. Ambedkar has been neglected by the previous regimes only because of ideological differences between them on one side and Nehru and Gandhi on the other. The author further praises post 2014 efforts by PM Modi such as the construction of statue of unity and installation of the granite statue of Netaji at India gate as symbolising a New India which gives these legends their due share and recognition. Without a doubt, this by far was one of the major victories of Modi.

The second part of the book deals with dharma and diplomacy focusing on the importance of multi-alignment strategy in diplomacy pursued by Bharat today. Bharat is making its presence felt in international relations today and it is taking a clear stand now. The author delves deeper into why India and Pakistan can never be friends, why India should consider Japan as a crucial partner and engage actively with it and how New India should not bow down to Chinese pressures in the present geopolitical context. It also

sheds light on how the earlier idealistic foreign policy of seeking concessions and neighbour's love will not serve India's interests today. The author draws a sharp contrast in earlier foreign policy far from being practical and farsighted with the current foreign policy where India's national interest comes first, shedding the earlier Panipat syndrome, a term coined by Jasjit Singh. Utpal Kumar beautifully sums up India's contemporary approach by stating that today's Indian diplomacy is very assertive in its active engagements with the QUAD, G20, Arab countries, SCO, and others but without being offensive or aggressive in its nature. In this part, the author has done a very insightful analysis of India's relations with the West, China and Pakistan over the years while also highlighting what has changed post 2014. He emphasizes that the rise of New India no longer requires western approval for all its actions as evident in the case of the Ukraine Russia war and many other global instances as well.

In the last chapter of the book titled "Liberal Media, Illiberal Agenda" Utpal Kumar calls out the anti- Indianness and hypocrisy inherent in the agendas of the western liberal media. He brings into light the articles from some of the most well-known media channels of the west like the Guardian, BBC, New York Times and others which have frequently portrayed Modi as a Hindu supremacist, authoritarian, dictatorial leader always cracking down on dissent. The same media remains silent and is completely ignorant when it comes to China Xi, Pakistani generals, jihadi installation in Afghanistan or the prevailing dictatorship in North America. Utpal Kumar has left no stone unturned in analysing the rise of New India from reclaiming its civilisational history based on dharma to criticising Lutyens' Delhi elites and hypocrisy of western liberal media while also unfolding its multi-aligned assertive foreign policy. *Bharat Rising* is a must-read book for all those who want to understand the differences between the present government's approach with the earlier ones and what has changed in India in the span of last ten years. It gives various interesting insights into the rise of New India with belief in its own destiny and strength rooted in the dharmic philosophy.

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