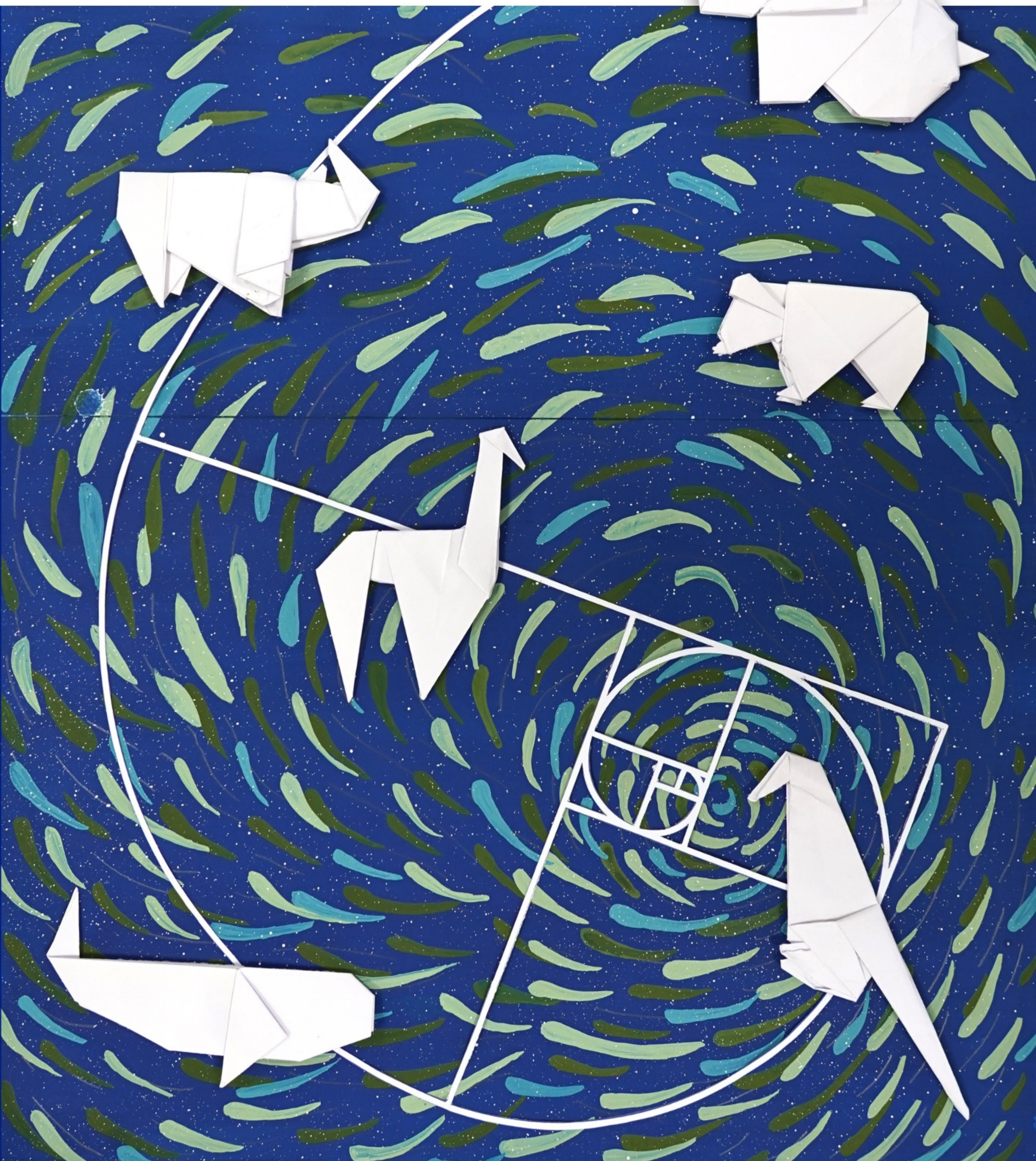


Confluence: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies

VOLUME VII-VIII



SYMBIOSIS SCHOOL FOR LIBERAL ARTS

Note from the Board of Editors

Introduction to Volume VII-VIII

Confluence: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (CJIDS) (ISSN (online): 2582-3256) (formerly Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies) was launched in 2017 with the goal of fostering undergraduate research. The journal is rooted in an episteme that not only actively encourages students to break the boundaries that have traditionally segregated disciplines into silos, but also asks them to synthesize insight from multiple streams of thought. Consequently, while it aims to encourage sustained and rigorous engagement with questions that are located at the intersection of various disciplines, it also attempts to make space for research that seeks to bring perspectives from multiple disciplines to broaden and deepen our understanding of questions that are typically seen as rooted in a single field of knowledge. We trust that this issue of Confluence has been able to reflect—and offer us the opportunity to reflect upon—the journal's core mandate.

This volume has three categories of writing: eight research articles, three commentaries and one book review. Put together, these articles cover themes across several disciplines, including Film and Culture studies, Media studies, Psychology and International Relations. But it is essential to underscore that each article in itself multidisciplinary borrowing from paradigms within a stream of thought, with the aid of and repercussions upon multiple others.

The eight research articles cover themes such as Exploring ideas of Nationalism through the prism of censorship; Understanding attitudes towards animal cruelty among Jan Vegans and Non-Jain Vegans; A theoretical reflection on the idea of the spectacle as presented in the works of Guy Debord, and a rearticulation of the nature of the spectacle in a moment of precarity; An analysis of impact of divisive political views upon relationships, and family dynamics in particular; An assessment of the Impact on International Engagements due to the Ethiopian Military Rule; Exploring Psychosocial Outcomes of Microaggressions Against Queer Students in Meghalaya; An analysis of Cross-Generational Perspectives on Adolescent's Fashion; and the changing perceptions of clothing meaning over time; and lastly Examining the Efficacy of Humanitarian Carve-Outs Within the United Nations Sanctions Regime.

The three commentaries in this issue draw the reader's attention to topics of Exploring intersectional identities and societal challenges; Understanding the parallel between the rise of romanticism during the Industrial revolution identity crisis and the emergence of Tiktok as a platform for artistic expression post the Covid-19 pandemic isolation and finally Understanding the conflict between liberalism and neoliberalism through the lens of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The issue culminates with a book review – Empires of the Sea: A Human History of the Indian Ocean World by Dr. Radhika Seshan – a fascinating book which investigates India’s maritime history and one that brings to light an unexplored side of Indian history that was forgotten due to colonization, which is our connections to the water that surrounds us and to what lies on the other sides of those waters.

Lastly, the cover page of this issue, conceptualized by the design team of CJIDS, attempts to reflect the epistemic foundation of the journal. It is inspired by the mythos associated with the watering hole: a place where animals of various stripes congregate to replenish, the watering hole is also associated with an undeclared but generally accepted truce among diverse species. Even as the cover page tugs at the significance of a watering hole as an index of confluence, it complicates a unitary understanding of convergence by including a graphic nod to the expanding spiral of the Fibonacci sequence. The cover page continues CJIDS’ legacy of mobilizing origami as a singular signifier of form and flow, uniformity and mutation, and originality and replicability. In reframing tradition in this manner, the cover page also attempts to point us toward the various ways in which a range of disciplines configure the relationship between continuity and difference.

Acknowledgements

The release of Volume VII is an outcome of the combined motivation, dedication and perseverance of a large team with many new members over the last six months. Taking over the editorial reins from a stalwart team is always challenging. I am proud to state that this team has rallied behind this project and collectively ensured that this edition sees the light of day.

We are thankful to our expert reviewers for carving out valuable time to review and provide detailed, rigorous and constructive feedback. I am particularly thankful as their detailed and insightful comments have provided a much needed nudge and encouragement to our budding authors. Our student interns are the real stars of this team and we thank them for bringing their creative ideas and enthusiasm to every task required. Many thanks to the academic teams – Aditi Vaidyanathan, Kaushal Balaji, Lakshita Tanwar, Rajlakshmi Waikhom, Nandini Arora, Riddhi Rohatgi for their attention to detail, meticulous copyediting and proofreading have enhanced the overall readability of the content. Being a web based journal – Jai Bakshi and Sheuli Banerjee have done a stellar job managing the CJIDS website and ensuring a more intimate experience accessing the journal. The ideation of our cover page was done by Ishwari Dhok (Batch 2020-2024) and interns on the design team – Rachana Jadhav, Adithi Bhat, and Kompal Zinta were instrumental in translating this idea into a beautiful and striking cover page.

Lastly, we extend our thanks to Dr Shweta Sinha Deshpande, Director, and Dr. Anita Patankar, Founder Director and Advisor, Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, for their support and encouragement throughout this journal's journey.

Manjari Jonnalagadda

Editor-in Chief on behalf of the Board of Editor

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Articulating Nationalism: Public Censorship of Cinema and the Re-imagination of the Nation in Contemporary India

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How to Cite this Paper

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Abstract

The nation is not merely a geographical, territorial, or physical entity. A nation is not just its people. National sentiment and identity too, is not only articulated by its citizens, but is also performed through material forms and symbols. It is also an entity that is articulated through cultural forms, imagined, and constructed through texts. Often, the study of cinema's role in the production of the nation's imagination has prioritised a text-centred approach. This paper intends to contribute to these debates through another prism: cinematic censorship. Cinematic censorship has played a significant role in the cultural politics of the territory of India, both as a colonial entity and later as a post-colonial nation. Cinematic censorship has, therefore, allowed for a rich field of scholarship to emerge around the production, exhibition, and distribution of cinema during colonial and post-colonial times. Censorship has primarily been understood through the logic of a governing state entity that certifies a film for approval. Such an understanding fails to account for the existence of other entities that exercise control over cinema. Alternatively, this paper stresses the need to account for the public as an important entity that influences the production, distribution, and exhibition of cinematic texts. It, therefore, produces the idea of the public in contrast to the state as a central driving force in the imagination of the nation in cultural terms. Locating public censorship in relation to the rise of the Hindu right-wing in India, this study looks at the role played by public censors in furthering the ideological and political project of Hindu nationalism. It approaches the phenomenon by locating it as a structural response to

processes of colonisation and the subsequent contradictions between modern and traditional forms of authority in the nation. This paper then intends to expand how the disciplines of Political Science and Film Studies look at the questions of cinema, censorship, and the nation by accounting for the role of public interventions in terms of their cultural, ideological, and political significance.

Keywords: Cinema, Censorship, Nation, Public

Producing an Object of Study: Censorship, Cinema, and the Nation

The history of cinema in India is one of an entity informed by the intrusion and presence of censorship practices by both the state and the public. As Madhav Prasad informs us, Indian cinema, (specifically referring to its most dominant strand, Hindi cinema) has been a textual signifier of the meanings of nationhood (Prasad, 1998). Even prior to independence cinema provided an important space for the construction of the nation's identity, while also offering the space for the negotiation of these meanings. It is unsurprising, then, how enquiries in culture and cinema have drawn on these cinematic traditions to understand their engagements with the larger national project. I posit that this history can be approached through a different prism, that of cinematic censorship. Again, drawing from Prasad, cinema in India may be read as an utterance of the underlying structural conflicts between modern and traditional modes of production and organisations of society. Taking this further then, I argue that if cinema can be understood as being governed by the contradictions of the nation-state, as can cinematic censorship. The complex relationship between expression and tolerance, as simultaneously endorsed and disputed as a part of 'democratic' processes, demands a closer investigation into the ideological and censorial practices that govern cinema. Generally, censorship has been understood as representing a society's views on moralities and its limits on tolerances. However, I contend that such a reading of censorship is simplistic and calls for a more discursive understanding of what the norms of permissibility reflect. On this ground, I argue that cinematic censorship is not only informed by a pre-existing and popularised imagination of the nation-state, but also reproduces it.

Here, I shift from a simplistic understanding of film censorship, where the primary authority of approving a film lies with the state and, towards a more nuanced one that accounts for the role of the public as a governing entity. Here, I draw from the works of Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1999), Nandana Bose (2009), and Lawrence Liang (2015/2022), who have provided important insights that can help us understand this moment. Nandana Bose further notes that the late 1990s to the early 2000s are years that are significant to our understanding of cinematic censorship because of the manner in which cinema becomes one of the loci of the moral panic of the nation – especially

around sexuality, religion, and war. This moral panic was especially articulated through repeated state and public interventions by right-wing forces in light of a changing nation space and the anxieties surrounding the liberalisation of the nation (Bose, 2009).

The 1990s were important years in terms of state intervention in cinema and were witness to various controversies that the Central Board of Film Certification had gotten involved in. However, since there has already been extensive work done on these controversies during this decade by Bose (2009), my work will not be diving into the specificities of these debates. Instead, this paper intends to focus on (a) a theoretical understanding of public censorship and (b) the relation between public censorship in the 1990s to that in contemporary India. I intend to provide fresh insights into the relation between cinema, censorship, and the nation by locating authority in non-state bodies, i.e., the public, rather than a state body. Public censorship in India, as this paper shows, is a specific historical response to the contradictions between the modern state and the pre-modern feudal structures. It essentially represents a form of “extra-legal” (Kaur and Mazzarella, 2009) censorship, implying that it lies outside of the legal system. Yet, if we were to extend this idea further, then we may also read public censorship as the articulation of a desire to claim control over the public sphere. Even further, we may read this as an attempt to define what is culturally acceptable and tolerable. Public censorship does not have the same legitimacy as film certification does, yet today, we continue to see it grow. Public discontent towards cinema is not a recent phenomenon. I argue that contemporary instances of public censorship today can be traced back to similar instances in the 1990s. We may identify how this legacy is continued in two ways: (a) the violent spectacle of dominant identity and majoritarianism politics that it invokes and (b) the ideological grounds of religious nationalism that it stands on. I posit that the growth of this phenomenon is a symptom of fractures in the processes of nation-building, and also plays an active role in the re-imagination of the nation based on religious and cultural lines rather than secular and territorial lines.

This paper is divided into three sections. I begin by looking at the 1990s, which allows us to lead up to the politics of public censorship in contemporary India. These are the moments that see the rise, as well as the progression and perhaps now the arrival of a growing national culture based on exclusionary grounds. I unpack these moments as they reveal their forms of maintaining control over the cinematic public sphere and their relation with the state and legality. I look at Deepa Mehta’s 1996 film, *Fire*, and the arguments and controversies surrounding it as a case study, one that feeds into our discussions about censorship and an unconventional usage of the freedom of speech. In the following section, we will look at how this sentiment is possibly indicative of a re-imagination of the nation on majoritarian-religious, non-secular, and non-democratic lines. Further, we will try and understand the root of these tendencies and their sudden break of emergence with the liberalisation of the nation-state. I argue that the politics and performativity that we see of public censorship today have been informed by several seminal, violent, and destructive moments from our past. To approach this paper, I draw from both

primary and publicly available secondary literature, including the laws themselves, amendments made by the state, films, as well as news reportage and commentaries on film censorship in India.

A Public Gone Rogue

The 1990s in India witnessed a rising tide of anger and many voices from the Hindu nationalist sections of the public claiming space and legitimacy in the public sphere (Varshney, 1993). The 1990s, thus, become an important moment in which we locate these debates because of the significant ideological, political, and economic shifts that the nation witnessed. These were the years when the nation had witnessed many moments of political instability with the death of two Prime Ministers and the failure of the modernising state machinery. Just as importantly, these were also the years that witnessed the ‘LPG reforms’, or the liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation of the Indian economy. The decade witnessed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, which was followed by communal riots all over the nation, as well as the Anti-Mandal agitations. With such events, the 1990s remain not just an important time that indicates shifts in ideology and politics but also remains in national memory as a decade of visceral public spectacles of violence and dominance. This is central to our understanding of public censorship. Cinema has always been a medium that attracts attention for various reasons, specifically because of its ‘public-ness’ or the collective experience it calls for. It attracts judgment, discussion, debates, and opinions. It is not uncommon to see various public groups across the political spectrum calling for bans or seeing pushbacks against films. I intend to draw attention to those instances of public censorship that have evoked censorial performance in the name of protecting the ‘national’. The national that I am referring to here is not the progressive or inclusionary idea of the national but, the exclusionary imagination of India that seems to be drawing from the ideals of Hindutva.

By drawing on instances from the 1990s and contemporary times that have evoked questions about the freedom of speech and expression within the context of cinema in India, I intend to argue that the idea of freedom of speech has not been universally applicable to all citizens. The questions we must ask, then, are these: how are the norms surrounding the freedom of speech constructed? How do larger narratives, structures and discourses produce certain voices and ideas as more important or permissible to be discussed in the public than others? The controversy surrounding Mehta’s *Fire* and its subsequent public censorship by right-wing forces allow us to understand that freedom of speech is neither universally applicable nor neutral and unbiased. It often contradicts itself. As we see with this controversy and other previous examples, who has the freedom of speech, or rather the freedom to speak without legal consequences, can be deeply influenced by pre-existing biases in the state machinery and the influence of dominant narratives. This is the premise under which I understand the current threats to the freedom of speech in

cinematic networks. This leads us into the following section where we look at these instances more closely to understand what kind of sentiments are at play here.

The incidents with *Fire* were premonitory of a much longer line of reactionary public sentiments toward cinema in contemporary India, where religious and national identities (now almost synonymous) become the grounds upon which the public maintains its authority to act. The synonymy of these two identities (as well as their performances in culture and politics) only furthers the imagination of an exclusionary, and perhaps even regressive conceptualisation of the nation. The events surrounding the recent inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in January 2022, are perhaps an apt set of examples to discuss before we move to a closer reading of the film. The building of the Ram Temple over the desecrated mosque was the culmination of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the Rath Yatra undertaken by L.K. Advani (senior leader of the BJP) in 1991. One of the ways by which those who opposed this move by the central government to build the temple chose to resist was by screening Anand Patwardhan's *Ram ke Naam* (1992). However, during the weeks surrounding the inauguration of the temple, there emerged a series of events that are representative of the freedom of speech paradox. Many who wished to screen the film were forbidden from doing so, whilst those who wished to prohibit these screenings were able to do so. These pressures were often enacted by the state, as well as members from right-wing groups. For example, the student's association in the Film and Television Institute of India (FTIISA), Pune, was attacked by right-wing groups. The students of the institute had been holding up a banner stating 'Remember Babri', and had organised a screening of *Ram ke Naam* as well as a photo exhibition of the demolition. Earlier in the same week, other right-wing groups were spotted outside the gates of the campus, shouting the slogan 'Jai Shree Ram' and threatening students that they would return with a bigger mob if the film was screened (Rajpurohit, 2024). In another case, at the private institute Ashoka University (Sonapat, Haryana), students were asked to remove posters of the screening of the documentary by the university administration. On the other hand, religious celebrations surrounding the inauguration of the temple were allowed to be held in other open, free-for-use spaces of the university (Kuntamalla, 2024). Similar prohibitions were imposed by different forces in Hyderabad and the K.R Narayanan National Institute of Visual Sciences and Arts in Kerala. The screening organised by a club, 'Hyderabad Cinephiles', was stopped by the Telangana police, and members were allegedly arrested (ABP News Bureau, 2024). In Kerala, students were once again threatened with violence by a group of people associated with the RSS (Sydeek, 2024). These acts of 'extra-legal' forms of censorship are especially important to read in the contemporary context because they indicate a changing state-public nexus and, therefore, a changing imagination of the nation that allows for these acts to increase in number.

From this point onwards, I turn to one of the significant instances of public censorship in India, that is, the pushback against *Fire* in 1996. The events surrounding the film are significant not only because of the political and social spectacle of the film itself, but also because of the

debates and scholarship surrounding censorship and the freedom of speech that it incited. Here, I draw from the works of Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1999), Nandana Bose (2009), and Lawrence Liang (2015/2022), who have provided novel insights that help us understand this moment. As Bose notes, the incidents surrounding the Fire controversy were surrounded by three other cases of film censorship – *Khalnayak* (Villain) (1993), *Bombay* (1995), and *War and Peace* (2002). What we see today follows the same logic, where the public becomes one of the entities that expresses the moral panic surrounding cinema. However, drawing from its past and as we can see from the examples in 2024, these moral panics are clearly tied to how certain sections of the public imagine the nation.

Fire faced extreme criticism from the Shiv Sena (a political party active in the state of Maharashtra) for its representation of a lesbian relationship between two women named Radha and Sita. Another important aspect of this case that we must pay attention to is the presence of a certain figure, i.e., Bal Thackeray, and his role in the inciting acts of vandalism by Shiv Sainiks (activists from the party) against the exhibition of the film. Upon release, Hindu right-wing groups, such as the Bajrang Dal, disrupted exhibition spaces and, in some cases, literally set fire to the theatres (Jain and Raval, 1998). Thackeray, assuming the role of the guardian of a Hindu tradition, as well as sections of the Indian public from the right, were, of course, vehemently against the film. In one statement, Thackeray opposed the film by stating: “Why is the entire film shown against the backdrop of a Hindu family? Why have the names Radha and Sita been given to lesbian partners in the film? Why are their names Radha and Sita and not Saira and Shabana?” “Lesbianism is not Indian.” (Thackeray, as cited in Rajadhyaksha, 1999). If we look at the keywords of offence here (Hindu, Radha, Sita, and lesbian), we can see how Thackeray’s statements again reproduce the Hindu identity not only as sacred but as the most important identity. Further, look at how Thackeray equates Hinduism with Indian (Lesbianism is not Indian), thereby equating the nation with religion. His remarks not only define national identity in terms of religion, but also in terms of sexuality. Thackeray’s remarks equate the heterosexual self as Hindu and the Muslim other as homosexual. By doing so, these remarks not only locate Islam as the other to the Hindu/Indian self, but also reinforces the idea that female body sexuality is a ground for the contestations of national identity.

The incidents of the Fire controversy, and the debates surrounding public and state morality that it incited can offer us useful insights on understanding the relation between extra-legal and legal forms of censorship in India. Using our understanding of “extra-legal” forms of censorship as indicative of a desire to control moralities and demand space in the public sphere, the incidents surrounding the film can help us develop a fresh framework to understand public censorship. This is an episteme that can help us unpack many of the events that we see today as well. Simultaneously, these events can help us understand some very important arguments about the possibility of understanding the freedom of expression in a non-universal or ideological manner. According to Rajadhyaksha, what becomes interesting about the figure of Thackeray (here) is

that he simultaneously makes use of freedom of speech as a citizen, but due to his position in politics, also acts a representative of the state, thereby blurring the boundaries between a public and state censorer (Rajadhyaksha, 1999). Thackeray, like most actors of public censorship, represents a kind of sentiment that claims authority over the nation-space whilst vehemently opposing the current mechanics of law for not representing their exclusionary interests. In other words, Thackeray and the Shiv Sainiks, or Bajrang Dal activists, among many others who undertake acts of public censorship in the name of preserving culture/public decency/morality, represent a kind of traditional authority that does not align easily with the apparent constitutional morality of the state.

The synonymity of the national with the religious is only possible when one begins to argue that the basis of a nation is religion – not language and not territory. This is the sentiment that we are witnessing the fulfilment of today, especially with the rise of the incumbent ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and its alliance with Hindu fundamentalism in India (Datta, 1999). Public censorship, in all its bravado and evocation of sentiment, becomes a means by which authority is maintained over the subject, while modern identities that reject or even question such modes of existence are rejected. Yet, the existence of these two forms is contradictory, but that does not mean that they do not co-exist and feed off each other for legitimacy. This is precisely where the crisis of the Indian state lies, in its simultaneous desire to resolve this contradiction between modern nation-states while hoping to hold on to some indigenous national identity that differentiates from that of the colonisers. Such acts of public censorship are signs of a rise of public morality and authority that attempts to override the cinema and the filmmaker's freedom of expression. This leads me to the following section that further explores the question of the freedom of speech in relation to these contradictions.

Who has the freedom to express?

Let us note that the expression of one's sentiment unless it has the potential to harm another citizen, is a granted, fundamental right in a democracy. However, that does not seem to be the case in the examples cited above. The debates surrounding the freedom of speech and its limits are often constructed around 'what' is being said and how it may harm or offend a citizen or the state itself. However, the limitation of this framework is that it does not allow us to understand how these notions of harm and offence are constructed. Are they based on a universal understanding of what harm is, or rather, can they be understood as being arbitrarily constructed in the favour of those in power? I argue that the right to freedom of expression can become non-neutral and shift with changes in national narratives. I draw on debates surrounding the freedom of speech to understand the state's response to public censorship within the context of a possible re-imagination of India.

A crucial contribution to our understanding of the freedom of speech comes from the liberal tradition of political philosophy, especially elucidated through John Stuart Mill's harm principle. To extrapolate Mill's words, "the only reason for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will is to prevent harm to others." (Mill, 2003). Invoking Mill's harm principle, one may argue that citizens have the right to the freedom of speech in a democracy so long as the act of expression does not encroach upon the liberties of another individual or community. For Mill, state intervention is only justified (and necessary) when one individual's liberty may interfere, intrude, or coerce another individual's sovereignty. This intervention is what we understand as being manifested in state censorship. In Mill's framework, censorship is based on the premise that an individual's liberty of self-determination is not absolute. Therefore, the only time when the state can rightfully exert power over its subjects is to prevent harm to another. Now, using the harm principle, if we were to think about whether the state was rightfully exercising its responsibility, I would argue that it has often not done so in its ambivalence and underwhelming response to public censorship. Here, I draw on Laura Beth Nielson, who builds on Mill's framework to argue that the harm principle does not always work as neutrally as one would assume it does. Nielson primarily works on law and hierarchy within American politics, but one can use her broad analytical framework within the Indian context as well. Nielson argues that what is considered harmful is often conditional because our legal and political systems can be more tolerant of certain kinds of public speeches than others (Nielson, 2006). In an ideal democracy, the state's responsibility would be to protect all of its citizens, not a few. Further, as the utilitarian harm principle informs us, the ideal state would have to choose then between the maximum harm to many, or the minimal amount of harm to a few. However, the inability of the state to do so (such as in the case of the controversies cited earlier) is indicative of its ambivalence to violence in the artistic sphere.

The fact of the matter is that public censorship does not work in the same manner as legal censorship, something that has already been established. Liang complicates this by introducing three categories of these extra-legal forms – meta-censorship, para-censorship, and auto-censorship. Meta-censorship refers to those interventions by extra-legal authorities (often those with some kind of political stature) who have played an active role in censoring films, but are not a part of the system of film certification. This kind of censorship works through the logic of denying a film exhibition on certain grounds and exists over and above the legal forms of censorship. For example, in 1995, Thackeray only allowed the exhibition of Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* after he had his own private screening in his house (Liang, 2005). Para-censorship is driven more by the logic of producing a spectacle of sentiments surrounding the censorer's disagreement with the film. It is essentially the boycott of a film, or an attempt to reduce the number of people who watch the film. Like meta-censorship, it also exists outside the legal system, but unlike it, it acts as a parasite that attempts to directly attack the production, distribution, and exhibition of a film. It makes use of the logic of virality, i.e., by extending power and authority over the film by drawing attention to itself. The right to reject a film through

the spectacle of public uproar is the sovereignty of the audience gone rogue. This is because, historically, extra-constitutional means of public censorship in India have consciously disregarded the authority of law and crossed the boundaries of the right of the freedom of speech. Lawrence Liang argues that one of the primary differences between traditional forms of film censorship and forms of public censorship is the fact that the latter specifically use tactics of emotions to achieve their motives. This can simultaneously have disastrous effects in terms of public discourse (because it can often mobilise violence) but can also indicate threats to what ideally should be a democratic sphere of discussion.

Deepa Mehta's *Water* (2005), which faced a pre-production form of censorship is another example of how the power to control cinema gets located in the public censor. The film's production began in Uttar Pradesh in 2000, but faced extreme forms of public intervention on the grounds that the film was insulting Hindu religious sentiments. Demonstrations were held across the city of Varanasi, and the films' production sets were vandalized (Alahakoon and Phillips, 2010). This ultimately led to the filmmaker having to postpone the making of the film. A more recent example of para-censorship could be understood through the example of the *Padmavaat* (2018) controversy. Auto-censorship, for

Liang, is essentially the consequence of the other two forms and is realised through their repetitive practices. The result of auto-censorship is essentially the need for filmmakers to have to self-censor their own work to avoid interjections from both the state and public authorities. Out of the three forms, I read auto-censorship as the most dangerous because it is indicative of a changing environment, where artists and citizens alike are required to be careful of what they create and what they consume, and in what modes they choose to do so to avoid clashes. The danger of public censorship is (a) that it transgresses an already sanctioned line of the law when it creates uproar against a film that has already been certified and (b) that it not only places restrictions on the freedom of the filmmaker's expression, but also on the rights of the public. Ashish Rajadhyaksha argues that such censorial instances place further restrictions not only on the freedom of speech, but also on the public's right to receive this freedom of expression (Rajadhyaksha, 1999). Rajadhyaksha makes an intervention that interprets the Article in the specific case of cinema, arguing that in the case of film, censorship not only hampers the freedom of the filmmaker, but also negates the film's relation with the audience. Drawing from this re-interpretation of this article in relation to cinema, I further argue that acts of public censorship (in the case of certified films) in their desire to decide what is fit for public consumption undermine the authority of the law. The danger of public censorship, unlike film certification or state interventions, is that it is far more uncontrollable. The greater the cases of extra-legal forms of censoring, the greater should be our concerns. This leads us to a very crucial point in our arguments – the changing public and its role in the re-imagination of India.

Changing Publics, Changing State

In this section, I turn to studying the contemporary moment through a historical and theoretical reading of the political, cultural and ideological turns of the Indian nation-state during the rise of public censorship in the 1990s. To understand this shift, we will have to locate the ideological shifts in Indian politics in terms of the crisis faced by the modern state in the years leading up to the liberalisation of the economy. Further, we will critically understand how these changes are related to the rise of vigilante publics (Banaji, 2018), not just in the realm of cinema but beyond it as well. The idea of the vigilante public, as put forth by Shakuntala Banaji, is the rise of a kind of “ethno-cultural violence” that often stands in defence of the far-right Hindutva ideology. The actions of participatory violence enacted by the vigilante public are rooted in feelings of superiority and claim over nationhood. The acts of public censorship we see today, are often indicative of the same sentiment (take the incidents at FTII cited above, for instance). Then, the intention of this trajectory is to map instances of public censorship in contemporary India to both an ideological terrain, and also other historical processes and events. This finally leads me to my primary argument, that contemporary film censorship in India can be read as an indication of a re-imagination of the nation along non-secular and non-democratic lines.

To further understand this shift, we must look at certain discursive shifts in the public sphere. The public sphere, as we now know it in the liberal model, is understood as those common spaces where rational citizens adopt the tools of reason in order to deliberate on issues of common interest. The public sphere has undergone many critiques from Marxist, Feminist, and even liberal perspectives; the most well-known is perhaps that of Nancy Fraser (1985). Fraser’s criticism of the Habermasian public sphere is not only that Habermas romanticises it, but also that he fails to account for the existence of other non-liberal, non-bourgeois public spheres. Further, the criticism highlights how Habermas fails to account that the very existence of a public sphere has often been designed through processes of exclusion, where the marginalised have been denied access to the spaces that the sphere accounts for. As Diviya Dwedi informs us, most of these critiques highlight that the normative aspects of the liberal public sphere do not consider the real conditions, where the public sphere is based on a set of exclusions – in the case of India, these exclusions are primarily based on caste, gender, class, and religion (Dwedi, 2015). For Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, these exclusions are central to deciding who has access to the public sphere, and therefore, the sphere is not one of rational deliberation, but rather, one that is characterised by “struggles for discursive hegemony”. (Negt and Kluge, 1993 as cited in Dwedi, et.al, 2015). On the basis of already existing hegemonies and the clear divisions in Indian society, I further argue that the kind of public censorship we see today is both a product of, as well as a producer of, the discursive hegemony of Hindu nationalism today. This is precisely a result of the assumption and invented synonymy of the basis of the Indian nation as religion. In defining the nation as such, it is imperative for the forces and wings of Hindu nationalism to enact the existence of a public sphere that is based on the same exclusions, thereby producing the majoritarian conceptualisation of India. This is not only the case with cinematic censorship, but

also the result of a series of movements highlighted earlier, such as the demolition of the mosque, the anti-Mandal agitations, and the rise of Banaji's vigilante public (Banaji, 2018).

To understand the politics of film censorship in contemporary India, we will have to locate ourselves in the debates surrounding the development of a re-imagination of India on majoritarian lines, a phenomenon that has gained its strength post the 1990s. I will begin by looking at how we understand the politics of the current moment, after which we locate the development of a national culture in relation to the changing nature of the Indian state. Once again, let us remember that the public is the site where the national is performed. The construction of an exclusionary nationalism is only possible through the inclusion and assertion of the Hindu patriarchal imagination of India. What is concerning about contemporary India is the rising sense of a need for auto-censorship from artists and citizens. What is further concerning, however, is the emergence of the public-state nexus, where both become the guardians of this national culture. The rising cases of public censorship, such as the storming of the NFAI theatre by right-wing groups at the screening of the film *I Am Not The River Jhelum* (2022) (Free Press Kashmir, 2024), although on a much smaller scale, are reminiscent of the censorial incidents of the 1990s. In turn, these events, I argue, are reminiscent of the increasing number of violent spectacles, such as that of Babri in 1992. They are reminiscent of the kind of violence that asserts the idea of India as a nation belonging to the Hindus first, and other minorities second.

The current politics of cinema are undoubtedly a part of a larger project of nation-building. This logic of the role of arts in the process of nation-building is simultaneously the same as the immediate post-colonial moment, and yet, different. It is similar because both the liberal-left form of nationalism we saw in the early two decades (Ahmad, 1993) as well as the latent cultural nationalism we see now have had to grapple with contradicting forces in a fight for identity. The post-colonial moment had to produce an idea of India as a nation, despite its differences in languages, geographies, and identities. It also had to use the logic of a strong, centralised state to produce a citizen that was 'ready for democracy'. Yet the current moment differs because it represents a far more exclusionary form of national identity based on the imagination of a memory of a pre-colonial past and the greatness of tradition. Such an imagination can only justify itself by mystifying the past as something that needs to be returned to. Both these forms are coercive and exclusionary in their own ways, but the latter is a much more dangerous idea because, unlike the former, it completely negates the need for a secular state and its separation from religion. Nehru too, saw great potential in cinema as a tool capable of educating the masses, a desire that was later manifested in the setting up of the Films Division. The documentary film soon became a tool in the hands of the state in the larger post-colonial project of building a civic consciousness around cinema, but one that was manifested in its usage as state propaganda. These documentaries followed the logic of attempting to capture the reality of the new nation-building project along with its ideals of big development, technology, education, and what

it meant to be a ‘good citizen of the state’ (Jain, 2013). In many ways, we inherited the colonial model of film censorship, but unlike the colonial form, censorship in the post-colony turned into the logic of nation-building and the larger ideology of the Nehruvian centralised state. It is important for us to note that the impulse of Hindu nationalism has always been a political commitment to Hinduism and its integrity to the territorial and ideological imagination of India (Varshney, 1993). The present form of the nation we see, could possibly be understood as one that does not see this difference as clearly – and that becomes a threat to all other identities in the nation.

The general sense of fear of an encroaching state and the rise of a violent, masculinist, nationalist public censorer can be read as an indication of the development of an authoritarian regime and the growth of a fascist performance of national identity. Many of the incidents of public censorship (and even beyond the realm of cinema), cited in these arguments have been performed by members either a part of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh/RSS (National Self Help Organisation) or its associated Sangh Parivar. I argue that these events, many of which include threats to minority communities, attempts at violence, the assertion of national and religious identities, and disruptions of spaces, all gained their authority from the events in Ayodhya in 1992. In Aijaz Ahmad’s pertinent reading of the moment, he argues that the destruction of the mosque was nothing but a showcase of a fascist spectacle that was built on the Sangh Parivar’s groundwork organisation, the mob’s contempt for the law of the Constitution and the claims to the reclamation of a national cultural tradition (Ahmad, 1993). What we see today, both with film censorship and otherwise, is no different. We need not look further than to see members of parliament such as Navneet Kaur Rana stating: “agar iss desh main rahena hai toh Jai Shree Ram bolna padega” (If you want to stay in this nation, you will have to chant Lord Ram’s name) (Rana, 2024 in Maa Annapurna, 2024). This is no different from the chants heard on the streets, and of videos circulating online. What becomes a matter of concern, then, is the fact that these incidents of public censorship are not occurring in isolation, but in relation to other developments in the public sphere as well.

Public and politicians alike, the list of such performances is endless. This spectacle, in its own ways, acts as a censoring of other identities, as an imposition of violence by the majority. Fascism, as argued by Ahmad, Jairus Banaji, and Shakuntala Banaji, is always a politics of spectacles (Ahmad, 1993). These spectacles are always organised displays of power by the majoritarian groups. This is precisely why Banaji argues that the iconography of religion occupies a major part in building these spectacles (Banaji, 2002). It makes complete sense, then, how censorship in contemporary India is not just the logic of a simple ban, or a pushback – it is the presence of a series of events by the state and the public where certain identities are prioritised over others. Again, we need not go any further than the inauguration of the Mandir and the events surrounding it to understand the emerging nexus of power, authority, and propagation of dominant discourses of nationalism.

Jairus Banaji sees the core of this fascist sentiment as having two centres – the construction of a national myth and the presence of various cultures of authority. From the time when Banaji was writing this argument in 2002 to now, I would argue that the right-wing tendency in India has finally been realised in the form of the current government. On the basis of many of these examples, in the contemporary, one might argue that the lines between the public and the state support of the project of Hindutva are now coinciding. The rise of the vigilante public and the right wing in the government are at the centre of this movement. According to Shakuntala Banaji, all of these moments – lynching, threats to the lives of citizens, reactionary spectacles, and incitements of mob violence are (a) a rejection of the modern authority of the state and (b) an incredibly proud means of capturing and creating the public as Hindu (Banaji, 2018). In other words, re-imagining the nation as belonging to a single culture and community. Banaji further argues that this is the desired public sphere in the re-imagination of India. I am not arguing that this is where we have arrived, but it would be naïve to deny the strong presence of these elements in society. The flooding of our streets with images of Hindu gods (with an intention of expressing supremacy, not merely expressing one's identity), of changing textbooks, of increasing training camps – all of these explain the creation of the vigilante public, who in our case is the public para-censurer.

Now that we have understood the relation between censorship and the emergence of a Hindutva national culture, let us consider the factors involved in its development and its implications for the history of cinematic censorship. The years leading up to the liberalisation of the Indian economy had been years fraught with the disillusionment of a state that had failed to live up to its promises. Further, India had seen the assassination of two prime ministers, Indira and Rajiv Gandhi and the presence of an unstable government. The state was characterised by a contradiction of simultaneously promising material developments but failing at enforcing them because of our state capacity, i.e., the ability of a state to function in such a manner that allows it to reach its desired goals (Kapur, 2000). The rise of the Hindu right, then, can be understood as the consequence of both ideological and material developments. The Hindu right-wing, or Hindutva, only rises at the time of threat of the external forces of globalisation, and the need for globalisation came precisely from the inability of the Indian state to sustain itself. Further, the rise of globalisation was supplemented with the collapse of a left-liberal kind of nationalism. The earlier national project needed to be supplemented with a different national agenda. This paved the way for the rise of Hindutva nationalism, which public censorial forces have often drawn inspiration from. Rajni Kothari argues that we can locate the emergence of Hindu nationalism as we know it today within these contradictions (Kothari, 2005): those of opposing global and local forces, of an ideological debate between the left and right wing about the kind of developmental trajectory necessary for the state and the simultaneous presence of an incapable state. These created the perfect conditions for the imagination of the need to revitalise the nation along alternative lines. This sets the stage for the rise of the vigilante public, the emergence of a certain

nationalist culture and the rise of violence on the streets as a means of displacing the anger towards the failure of state and civil society processes.

However, simply rooting the violence that we see today within the understanding of a class conflict and the unfulfilled promises of modern development would be dangerous. This is because it does not take into account the rootedness of this violence in an idea of the nation that imagines it as belonging dominantly to a single culture that has consistently been under the threat of external oppressions. A final point, rightfully highlighted by Kothari – is that the very institutions of democratic processes (political parties, representative elections) are now all being used for the “anti-democratisation” (Kothari, 2005) of India to define who belongs, and who does not. This ‘anti-democratisation’ is essentially the indication of a changing nation space where opposing views, beliefs and ideas are subjected to incredibly low levels of tolerance, unlike in the idealised form of a democratic setting. A ‘democratic’ nation that loses out on its physical and metaphorical spaces to dissent, express opinions, criticise and ask questions about power, is one that becomes less democratic day by day.

Conclusion

All forms of censorship, how they function and what roles they play must be historicised in order to understand how they develop. Cinema and film censorship, then, become just another location where we may see the engagement of forms that participate in the production of ideological narratives that desire to re-imagine the nation and maintain further control over public consciousness. The arguments made in this paper intend to convey that the power to control cinema lies not only with the state and its sanctioned legal authority, but also with the public. This is precisely why we must pay attention to rises in public censorship because they indicate shifts in our understanding of authority in society. Any study of public censorship, begins with asking the question: what is the authority that sanctions the presence of this entity? It is only when we ask that question that we can understand the shifts in culture and politics. I contend that public censorship, then, is indicative of a very serious shift in Indian politics, one that we must deal with carefully. The phenomenon of the public censorship of cinema, as we know, is specifically rooted in the history and politics of India. It emerges as a symptom of the conflict and the tensions between the traditional and modern elements of Indian society and is representative of the sentiments of anti-tolerance. The forms that we see today are grounded in a non-secular reading of the nation, where only certain citizens belonging to certain communities have access to the privileges of the nation-state. We may not be there yet, but we are witnessing the creation of a more intolerant public sphere, where artists and citizens alike must be more conscious of all that they produce – speech, art, literature, cinema, or alternative ways of being that do not seem to fit into this imagination of India.

Such projects, as the one I have attempted to delineate in the reading of this current moment, can only survive by projecting themselves as something that is needed by the people of the nation. In the process, what we are witnessing is the apparent regeneration of a traditional past and the destruction of the idea of India and of a secular discourse. This does not mean we must return to the practices of the nation that came before the rise of extremism. Such an India is still torn at the seams by class, caste, religious and gendered conflicts. The project of the postcolonial nation-state has always had to contend with the forces of the modernising process, and the desires of traditional authorities to establish an alternative form of the nation, where religion, caste and patriarchy become the central organising principles. The consequences of the inability to resolve this contradiction are now in front of us. I would like to conclude with a proposition. It is in the face of such extremism that it is necessary for us to reconsider the politics of our spaces, and to ensure that such spaces exist as sites of resistance against the dominant authoritarian politics. Of course, nations have the possibility to be coercive entities, but the existence of their power and dominance cannot be the only grounds on which we contend against them. Nations can be defined on inclusive grounds, and they do have the potential to be progressive projects. In such circumstances, we must question the usage of this power and its manifestations in forms such as censorship, and question how we choose to define the nation. Today, the rise of public censorship is not only supplemented by the rise of various other films that seem to be supporting the dominant ideology of Hindutva, but also of other interventions in cinematic institutions. Is cinema, as well as other forms of media, made to be subservient to dominant discourses? What alternative paths can cinema adopt to resist? In such times, then, how does cinema respond, and how do the rest of us respond to such polarisation? The answer, I contend, can only lie in holding onto some progressive understanding of India, as well as holding state and other censorial forces accountable for their participation in the building of certain kinds of environments of intolerance.

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Beyond Ethics: A Study of Attitudes Towards Animal Cruelty Among Jain Vegans and Non-Jain Vegans

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Abstract

This research examined the motivations for the shift towards veganism, the practice of refraining from consuming or utilising animal products in the diet, amongst adherents of Jainism. As a religion, Jainism advocates strict non-violence and has specific injunctions against meat-eating and a variety of other plant products, but dairy products are permitted. This study investigated Jain vegan attitudes' particularly towards issues of animal cruelty since a prime motivator for the contemporary vegan movement is the exploitation in the dairy industry. It sought to compare attitudes of Jain vegans with other self-identified (non-Jain) vegans.

The study drew upon in-depth telephonic interviews with thirteen vegans from all over India and abroad. The interview findings have been divided into four themes: Exploitation in the Dairy Industry; Animal Advocacy: a Lifestyle; Ethical concern; and Everyday Veganism: Challenges. The study indicates that exploitation in the dairy industry was the primary motivator for most participants to adopt veganism. Participants from both Jain vegan and non-Jain vegan communities view veganism as a lifestyle change rather than a change in dietary preferences. 90% of participants avoid using products – leather, silk clothing, etc. – derived from animals. The participants shared their challenges and experiences while transitioning to veganism. Participants from both groups faced similar challenges while adopting a vegan lifestyle. My study suggests that Jain and non-Jain vegans seem to be united in their attitudes toward minimising animal cruelty and exploitation. Whilst there are a few studies on the shift to veganism amongst Jains based abroad, this exploratory study is the first to query Jain vegans based in India. It contributes to the

broader discussion around animal welfare and ethical dietary choices animating the concerns of many in the subcontinent.

Keywords: animal cruelty, dairy industry, ethics, Jainism, meat industry, vegan

Introduction

Veganism is a worldwide movement that advocates refraining from consuming or utilising animal products, particularly in the diet. It is a philosophy that condemns exploiting animals as a commodity (Guha & Gupta, n.d.). According to Statista, 9% of the Indian population identified as vegan in 2021, indicating that the movement has increasingly caught the attention of many Indians. This makes India one of the countries with the largest share of non-meat eaters in the world (Wunsch, 2023). Several Indians identify themselves as vegetarians. Also, other animal products like honey are not taboo. The adherence to a vegetarian diet follows mainly from religious injunctions against meat-eating in several Indian religions. However, some scholars maintain that meat was a permitted food, at least in Hinduism and Buddhism, at some point (Rampal, 2022).

Nevertheless, vegetarianism has been integral to Jainism, which traces its origins to the non-violent philosophy (*ahimsa*) espoused by Vardhamana Mahavir and other religious leaders from 500 CE. Jains, even today, are overwhelmingly vegetarian since research indicates that roughly 9 in 10 Indian Jains identify as vegetarian (Starr, 2021). Known all over the world for their stringent dietary choices, many Jains are now turning vegan, eschewing all animal-based products in their diet. The Jainism studies scholar Anne Vallely argues that Jain veganism aligns with the concerns of the broader transnational vegan movement, which also focuses on the well-being of livestock (2004).

Boredom and Creativity

The key objective of this qualitative investigation was to examine the perspectives of Jain vegans and non-Jain vegans and identify if there were any disparities in their motivations and attitudes toward adopting a vegan lifestyle.

I reached out to the members of the VeganFirst city-based WhatsApp groups, the links to which can be found on the VeganFirst Instagram linktree. I contacted 20 members of the VeganFirst group, and 13 responded. All participants in this study were recruited via WhatsApp and were over the age of 18. There were no specific inclusion criteria for participants only that they should

be Indian and adults. They were all interviewed between August and September 2023. Advocating for animal welfare while delving into animal cruelty taxed me emotionally and took a psychological toll on me. To avoid burnout inflicted by watching videos and documentaries which my respondents referred to, I took a break between my interviews.

The interviews were conducted via telephone. With the approval of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded. A semi-structured interview approach was used to carry on conversations to elicit rich data for qualitative analysis. I structured the interview to focus on the research question. I probed the respondents with follow-up questions to understand the respondents better. I paraphrased the participant's responses after every response to avoid misdirection and misunderstandings. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews to encourage participants to talk freely and respond openly to queries. Asking participants questions such as: "What motivated this transition?" allowed them to share their own experiences and opinions. Such questions helped me identify the fundamental reasons behind their choice to adopt a vegan lifestyle.

To improve the credibility of the study findings, the experiences of participants were explored in depth during interviews that lasted approximately 45 minutes. The audio recordings were carefully transcribed verbatim in a Microsoft Word document. In this investigation, participant identification was facilitated through the utilisation of labels (e.g., participant 1). All participants engaged in the study of their own volition, volunteering their participation.

I took the consent of all the participants through a consent form. After taking their consent, I briefed them about the goal of the study and the intended use of the participant data. If participants requested anonymity, I made sure that their identities would remain obscured. Participants are not referred to by their names in this paper. The study was reviewed by the department-level ethics committee.

During the initial interviews, I was unsure of my interviewing skills, and therefore I requested my interviewees to provide suggestions and feedback on the interview process. This feedback helped me refine the wording of the questions to ensure the flow of the interview. These adjustments based on feedback improved the quality of the interviews. I also took guidelines from the *SAGE Handbook for Interview Research* (Gubrium et al., 2012).

The study included individuals with varying lifestyle preferences before transitioning into a vegan lifestyle. Among the participants, three followed a non-vegetarian lifestyle, one followed an ovo-lacto vegetarian lifestyle, and nine transitioned from a vegetarian lifestyle to a vegan lifestyle. One of the participants was an 18-year-old transitioning Jain vegan. The participant has been avoiding dairy products for several weeks although has been unable to completely eliminate it. As a Jain, she consumes a vegetarian diet and eliminates root vegetables

The Trans-National Vegan Movement and Jainism-Intersections and Overlaps

There is a synthesis between Jainism's philosophy of non-violence and the trans-national vegan movement based on ethical and theoretical considerations surrounding animal welfare. This concoction provides a holistic view, particularly in advocating for a compassionate way of living.

The Vegan Society was co-founded by Donald Watson, who coined the concept of “veganism”. Today, it encompasses more than just dietary preferences (Dutkiewicz & Dickstein, 2021). According to the UK Vegan Society, a vegan is an individual who makes a conscious choice to lead a life that avoids cruelty to animals, with a focus on the welfare of animals, people, and the environment. Vegans consume a plant-based diet and avoid any products obtained from animals, such as meat, milk, eggs, and honey. A vegan lifestyle also includes avoiding apparel made of materials derived from animals, such as leather, wool, and silk. Vegans do so, primarily due to moral considerations concerning the rights and welfare of animals and also for health and environmental concerns. Online surveys and studies demonstrate that veganism has become increasingly accepted in recent years. Millennials are anticipated to be an important catalyst for the trend's growth (Parker, Graf, & Igielnik, 2019).

Greenebaum (2012) identified the following motivations within the vegan community for adopting a vegan diet:

1. Health: These individuals adopt a plant-based diet primarily for health reasons, aiming to lose weight or improve their physical well-being.
2. Environmental Concerns: These individuals are primarily concerned with the environmental impact of the meat industry. They may choose leather products over polyvinyl chloride (PVC) materials.
3. Ethics: These individuals adopt a vegan diet for moral, ethical, and political reasons. Their dietary choice is just one aspect of a broader lifestyle built upon a philosophy of animal rights.

These distinctions within the vegan community are not merely descriptive but carry significant value-based implications. According to Greenebaum (2012), certain influential figures in the vegan movement endorse individuals who make efforts to remove animal-based foods from their diets, regardless of their underlying motivations, as long as they contribute to reducing animal suffering. Conversely, other leaders within the vegan movement critique those who adopt a purely dietary approach to veganism without considering its broader political and ethical implications. They argue that veganism should be intrinsically linked to animal rights and advocate for its preservation as a form of revolutionary politics. Advocates of animal rights not only condemn animal slaughter but also the various forms of harm that precede it, especially in

the dairy industry. It stems from the practice of killing milch cows after they stop lactating. This concern for animal well-being has led to shifts in dietary choices and marketing, with some individuals moving from vegetarianism to veganism as only the latter completely avoids direct animal use (Miller & Dickstein, 2021).

Jainism, one of the oldest and toughest faiths in the world, is largely found in India, predominantly in western India. The Jain population in India is estimated to be around 4.5 million, or 0.4% of the total population (Starr, 2021). Western scholars have occasionally linked it with Buddhism and Hinduism (Grim & Tucker, 1994). The primary responsibility of the Jain community is to practise *ahimsa*, which is one of the toughest vows to adhere to. This Sanskrit term, which translates to ‘non-injury,’ not only encompasses non-violence in actions but also in speech and thought. It entails refraining from causing harm to others through words, deeds, or thoughts (Nirmala & Priya, 2020)

The last great teacher of Jainism was Vardhamana, also known as Mahavira. Bhagwan Mahavir’s message in the Acharanga Sutra is explicit: “All living, sentient beings, breathing or not, should not be killed, subjected to violence, abused, tormented, or driven away.” (Jain, 2016). Ahimsa in Jainism is more than just refraining from physical or social violence. It is a process of withdrawal and renunciation where Jains aim to protect themselves from the violence in the external world to prevent the accumulation of *karma*. Ahimsa goes beyond surface-level non-violence; it involves a deep connection with mental processes, aiming to eradicate *karma*, break free from the cycle of *samsara* (reincarnation), and attain *moksha* (liberation). The central belief of *ahimsa* revolves around the idea that every living entity possesses a soul caught in the cycle of *samsara*, marked by an endless journey of death and rebirth. The ultimate goal for every living being is to transcend this cycle and achieve *moksha*, a goal marked not by pleasure but by facing hardship and the inherent violence known as *himsa* (Gopalan, 1973).

James Laidlaw (1995), in “*Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society*,” described the traditional interpretation of *Ahimsa* in Jainism as the “ethic of quarantine.” He argued that it is impossible to stop the relentless cycle of death and rebirth; the most one can do is briefly delay it. These practices, fundamental to Jain non-violence, don’t aim to reduce deaths or preserve life in the conventional sense (Craig, 2013). Essentially, the traditional Jain perspective on nonviolence isn’t about making the world better but serves as a reminder that the external world can be harsh, and one should avoid getting entangled in it (Gopalan, 1973).

Permissible and Non-Permissible Food in Jainism

In the Jain theory (Sen et al., 2014), there are lifeless things and *jivas* (souls), the living things. *Jivas* are classified according to the number of senses they possess:

1. One Sense- Touch
2. Two Senses- Touch and Taste
3. Three Senses- Touch, Taste and Smell
4. Four Senses- Touch, Taste, Smell and Sight
5. Five Senses- Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight and Hearing

The most widely exploited animals, particularly those raised for food, are considered “five-sensed” beings, including humans (Wiley, 2006). These beings are believed to have a heightened capacity for experiencing pain and suffering. This understanding triggers deep compassion and serves as a warning to Jains about the serious karmic consequences of harming them.

Vegetables exhibit both single jiva and multiple jivas, including those with underground roots (such as ginger, beetroot, carrot, and potato), bulbs (such as onion and garlic), buds, figs, and fruits and vegetables containing numerous seeds (Jain et al., n.d). Alcohol is condemned because the process of fermentation and distillation destroys living creatures. Jains have traditionally avoided eating after sunset since they may unexpectedly destroy unseen life forms, and they only consume boiled and filtered water to avoid consuming minute water-borne organisms (Sen, et al., 2014). Jain scriptures include comprehensive regulations for how long meals can be kept before eating. Wandering Jain monks wear masks to avoid breathing in microorganisms and sweep the ground before them with a broom. Jain temples do not allow worshippers to wear animal products. Jains establish animal sanctuaries and hospitals for cows, birds, and other creatures. Contemporary Jains typically do not keep household pets.

The concept of *Jain abhaksyas* encompasses foods that are deemed unsuitable for consumption within Jainism. Traditional lists of *abhaksyas* include items like meat, eggs, and honey, among others. Moreover, these lists also encompass “secondary” items, including fruits with many seeds like pomegranates, root crops like potatoes and onions, and foods eaten at night (Wisdom Library, 2022). Most Jains are vegetarians and not vegans. Cows are believed to be treated well because of the importance of milk products for nutrition. In the Jain diet, dairy products comprising yoghurt, buttermilk, clarified butter, or ghee play an important role due to their content of vital nutrients. Wealthy individuals are renowned for utilising a significant amount of ghee due to the long-standing associations with wealth and health in India.

In diasporic Jain communities, according to Vallely (2004), some individuals tend to disregard these “secondary interdictions” and instead emphasise a “new category” of *abhaksya*, which includes dairy products, gelatine, casein, and similar items. This shift highlights changing dietary perspectives within Jain communities outside of their traditional settings. Vallely argues that adopting new dietary restrictions, like avoiding dairy products, is driven by compassion, not just self-control. It is a concrete rejection of animal exploitation.

In 2019, ascetic Padmasagar Maharaj urged the Maharashtrian Jain community to go dairy-free due to concerns about blood and pus in dairy milk. His message influenced many of the 650+ lay Jains present to either give up dairy or try a dairy-free diet for at least three months. He highlighted the health benefits and recommended nutritious alternatives like mung beans and legumes, aligning with a plant-based diet (Jain Vegans, 2021)

The UK-based organisation ‘Jain Vegans’ is aiding the Jain community in transitioning to a low-*himsa* vegan lifestyle. They conduct an annual “*Give up dairy for Paryushan*” campaign during the Jain holy festival of *Paryushan* (Jain Vegans, n.d.). The campaign encourages Jains to reconsider dairy consumption due to the violence associated with milk production. *Paryushan* is a suitable time for this campaign as it is when Jains reflect on and seek forgiveness for the harm inflicted on all living beings. This festival involves fasting as a form of purification, and Jain Vegans advocate abstaining from dairy consumption because of the significant violence involved in the dairy industry (*ibid*).

While some studies regarding the motivations of Jain vegans based in the West exist (Miller & Dickstein, 2021), we know very little about the attitudes of India-based vegans. This research is directed at understanding and comparing the perspectives of Jain and non-Jain vegans towards issues of animal exploitation and cruelty-free practices. This exploratory study draws findings from in-depth interviews conducted with self-identified vegans from across India.

Results

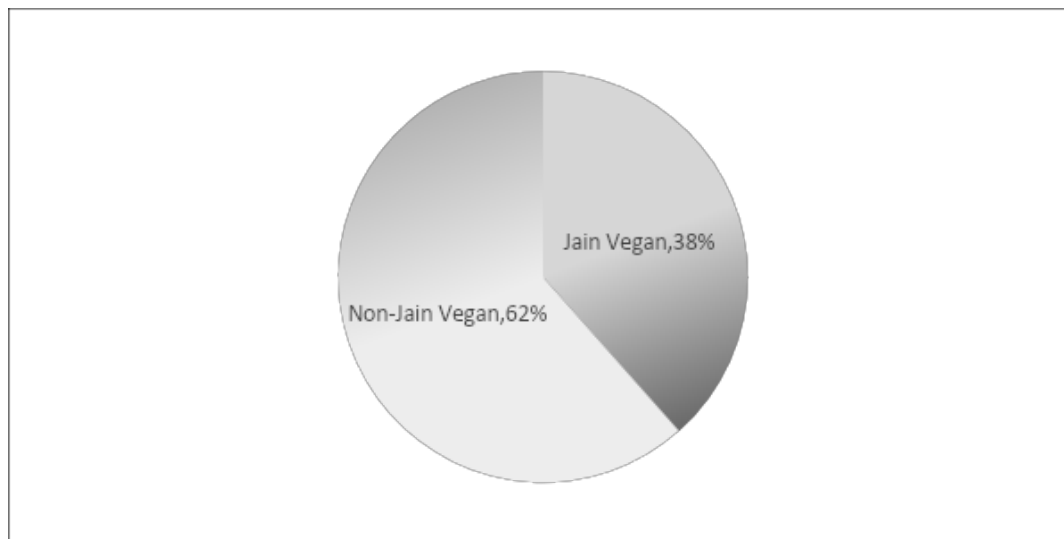


Figure 1: Participant’s Identity- This figure represents the percentage of Jain vegan and non-Jain vegan participants in the study.

The participant responses were grouped under four themes: Exploitation in the Dairy Industry, Animal Advocacy: A Lifestyle, Ethical concern, and Everyday Veganism: Challenges. I spoke to five Jain vegans and eight non-Jain vegans residing in Delhi, Mumbai, Chandigarh, and the United Kingdom. All of them were Indian and aged between 18-50 years, although a majority of them were in their twenties. There were eight men and five women, all employed in various service-based professions. All the non-Jain vegans belonged to the Hindu religion.

IDENTITY	
Jain Vegan	5
Non- Jain Vegan	8
GENDER	
Male	5
Female	8
LOCATION	
Delhi	7
Mumbai	4
Chandigarh	1
United Kingdom	1
YEARS OF TRANSITION	
Below 1 Year	11
Above 1 Year	2
Transitioning	1

Table 1: Participant's Data

Exploitation in the Dairy Industry

While many Jains in India avoid certain root vegetables to prevent harm to tiny beings, they still consume dairy products, which are directly linked to severe harm to cows, goats, and sheep. This

harm includes practices like forceful artificial insemination, separating calves from their mothers at birth, slaughtering male calves, and prematurely slaughtering non-milk-producing cows. Several participants became aware of exploitation in the dairy industry through documentaries like “*Ma ka Doodh*,” “*Earthling*,” and “*Cowspiracy*.” These films shed light on the harm inflicted on cows, shaping the participant’s understanding of the issue.

There’s a widespread cultural notion in the Indian subcontinent that portrays cows as willingly providing their milk to humans, using terms like “giving” or “offering” instead of “extracting” or “taking” (Miller & Dickstein, 2021). In some interpretations, *ahimsa* has been equated with non-killing rather than non-harming. However, there is increasing concern about cruelty in the contemporary dairy industry.

For example, participant 3 (a Jain vegan) highlighted their transition to a vegan lifestyle due to concerns about cruelty in the dairy industry, stating: “The practice of artificially inseminating cows multiple times where the calves don’t receive their mother’s milk; instead, it’s us humans who consume it. I can’t imagine being in the cow’s position and being exploited like that. This was one of the major factors that pushed me towards adopting a vegan lifestyle.”

Participant 4 (a Jain vegan) said: “When you learn about these processes and watch documentaries like *Maa ka Doodh*, you realise how cruel the dairy industry is. And that’s when the Jain in me woke up. Giving up dairy should be more important to Jains than giving up root vegetables because, with dairy, you are looking at cruelty toward a sentient being with all five senses. That’s where Jainism and veganism converge...”

Animal Advocacy: A Lifestyle

The majority of study participants strongly perceived veganism primarily as a lifestyle rather than a dietary choice. The study found that the participants weren’t all animal enthusiasts, but they cared about animal welfare. As a result, they adopted a lifestyle aimed at preventing harm to animals. Around 90% of the participants actively embraced veganism by avoiding leather products like shoes and jackets, refraining from using silk products like silk sarees, and choosing cosmetics not tested on animals. They avoided products that harmed animals in any manner.

Participant 2 (a Jain vegan) expressed a similar viewpoint by saying: “Veganism is not about health, if you’re going for health, that is a plant-based diet. Health and the environment do not cross over with animal rights, an ethical thing goes beyond health also.” Participant 10 (a non-Jain vegan) also stated, “Some people don’t grasp the fact that being vegan involves a complete lifestyle change. They often overlook the need to forgo items such as silk and leather, among other things.”

With organisations like PETA in society, an increasing number of individuals are becoming aware of veganism and being inspired to adopt this lifestyle. However, none of them mentioned being members of PETA.

The vegan interviewees were keen to dispel the misconception that veganism was an elite choice. One of the criticisms that is often levelled against store-bought vegan products like almond milk, oat, milk, soy milk, etc is that they are twice or even more expensive than dairy milk. However, many interviewees pointed out that one could make these alternative products at home at a much lesser expense. Therefore, they pointed out that one need not be wealthy to embrace veganism. Participant 2 (a Jain vegan) shared that she regularly made almond milk at home. She also refrained from buying many vegan products from the market.

Only families of two participants transitioned and about half the participant's families partially transitioned by avoiding dairy produce at certain times. For instance, Participant 10 (a non-Jain vegan) shared how her family consumed coconut milk tea in the evenings. These participants emphasised the importance of a gradual approach to transitioning to veganism. This suggests that people should start reducing consumption of animal products in other forms before adopting a plant-based diet. This shows an aspect of social dynamics when a majority is presented with consistency from a minority in presenting viewpoints, they start believing the information to be credible.

In families where participants felt resistance, they often expressed difficulty in social settings. Participant 1 (a Jain vegan) and Participant 8 (a non-Jain vegan) said that they did not receive much support from their families towards veganism. I was then prompted to ask how they kept themselves going. They were committed vegans and were adhering to their central ethical values. I could see that adopting a vegan lifestyle hindered their family time. Traditionally, family-oriented Indians consume meals in a family together. Having an exclusive meal made many vegans feel left out, especially during festivals and social gatherings. Both Jain vegans and non-Jain vegans affirm that veganism constitutes a lifestyle change, rather than a mere dietary choice.

Ethical Concern

All the participants highlighted the importance of ethical considerations for adopting a vegan lifestyle. 90% of participants chose to become vegan due to ethical considerations, aiming to minimise harm to animals. One participant adopted veganism primarily for health reasons. Ethical vegans prioritise reducing suffering, while others are often influenced by fad diets, aiming to improve health like the one in our study who adopted a vegan lifestyle solely for hypertension-related problems.

Most interviewees had to make changes in their social circle after adopting veganism. They socialised in like-minded circles because many a time, they were ridiculed for their veganism. They feel judged and invalidated by their peers and therefore, many of them were forced to sacrifice friendships and outings with friends. Participant 9 (a non-Jain vegan) shared, “I couldn’t go to a book club meeting yesterday because in the café’s menu, there are only limited choices for vegan items and I don’t want to pay ₹200 for a lemon water.”

While moral considerations were common in responses, the content of these discussions varied. Participant 7 (a non-Jain vegan) expressed his opinion by saying: “Any decision that affects the freedom of another being should not be upheld simply. The concept of ‘Speciesism’ exists in reality and this leaves me with no justification for continuing to consume animal products.”

The preference for a definition that included ethical concerns was frequently prevalent in other non-Jain vegan participants as seen in Participant 12’s conversation: “It was a combination of all three aspects; however, I would say that one of the biggest factors was the welfare of animals and not wanting to be a part of the exploitation of other beings for my satisfaction. Being healthy and helping the environment was certainly a bonus.” Participant 11 (a non-Jain vegan) elaborated on their perspective by saying: “Humans will never be perfect; cruelty will always exist, at least to some extent. However, individually, we can strive to do better. For me, it’s straightforward... Animals should not be treated as human property.”

Nevertheless, this positive view of the ethical implications can be contrasted with participant 6 (a non-Jain vegan) who did not identify ethical considerations as within the bounds of his transition to veganism. For instance, they outlined how veganism was something they did for themselves: “My transition was only to help me. There are other reasons. You’re not contributing to these dairy farming atrocities... but they are all secondary things. Ultimately, it will keep you healthier for long. You are helping yourself.”

Everyday Veganism: Challenges

When asked about the challenges faced by participants in social settings, there was a mixed response. Vegans highlighted that a major challenge stemmed from people’s ignorance. While many vegan participants received support from immediate family members, some struggled in social settings due to a lack of vegan-friendly cafes, and loss of friends. It was seen that only two participants had been vegan for over two years, and their advice on sustaining the diet included dedicatedly reading and watching helpful materials. All participants suggested watching documentaries like “*Maa Ka Doodh*,” “*Cowspiracy*,” and “*Earthling*,” which made them understand and adapt better to veganism. Participants view veganism as a moral obligation, parallel to the moral obligation of not enslaving another human being.

It was also observed that the three non-vegetarian participants in the study did not face significant challenges when transitioning to a vegan lifestyle. This transition was facilitated by the moments of realisation related to the positive impact they could make on society as a whole. A study highlighted that maintaining a vegan diet depends on the epiphanic moments and those who had one tended to be persistent in their diet (McDonald, 2000).

The interview process itself was an emotionally charged one for both me and the interviewees. Most interviewees were frustrated when their family and friends refused to understand their feelings towards issues of animal cruelty. For instance, Participant 4 (a Jain vegan) highlighted, “I was ignorant all these years. It’s not like I was born a vegan but when you get the information and guidance and continue to stick to the wrongdoing then it gets very frustrating.”

Participant 5 felt frustrated and helpless when people around her refused to see her point of view. Many vegans recounted facing hostility and negativity from their peers during their transition to a plant-based lifestyle. Participant 7 (a non-Jain vegan) shared: “People were so insensitive sometimes with consideration to the choices I made, they insisted me on having dairy products by saying “a little bit won’t hurt anyone”.”

While some participants remained frustrated and angry, others chose to deal with the resistance by increasing the tempo of their advocacy and consciousness-raising. Participant 3 (a Jain vegan) and Participant 10 (a non-Jain vegan) mentioned they were advocating through public-facing campaigns.

Participants were asked to consider the practical feasibility of incorporating veganism into their everyday lives. The phrase “As long as you are at home, it is possible and easily practicable” was prevalent across all participants. For instance, participant 9 (a non-Jain vegan) affirms: “Being a vegan is quite straightforward: you can’t go wrong with *roti*, *sabzi*, *dal*, and *chawal* (bread, vegetables, lentils, and rice). However, when it comes to trying out new things or experimenting with different foods, that’s where the challenge arises.”

Participant 13 (a non-Jain vegan) further demonstrates the emphasis on practicability for their conceptualization of veganism: “There are poor vegans in the world, and homeless vegans exist. It’s about ethical commitment, as simple as that. This world has a diverse range of food, and it is meant for human society. So, we lack nothing; we have everything. We just don’t take what doesn’t belong to us.”

The value-based implication Greenebaum (2012) talked about in their study is particularly evident in the explanation offered by Participant 1 (a Jain vegan): “Being 98% vegan is fine. However, the vegan community doesn’t go for that approach, they’re all about being 100% vegan all the time. That’s where I differ from a lot of other vegans.” Vegans often face stigma

associated with extreme beliefs. The implementation of veganism and animal rights ideology in real-life consumption presents challenges, as “pure” veganism, according to Greenebaum (2012), is unattainable on several fronts.

Discussion

Many participants expressed their commitment to boycotting not only dairy products but also other items associated with animals, such as cosmetics tested on animals, leather goods, and silk due to concerns about harm to silkworms. One of the primary findings of my research was that neither gender-based nor age-based discrepancies discern to influence motivation toward adopting a vegan lifestyle.

As asserted by Cherry (2006), vegans constitute a novel form of social movement that is rooted in the daily practices embedded within an individual’s lifestyle. In the context of this study, participants from both groups perceived veganism not merely as a dietary choice but as a profound lifestyle commitment.

My findings indicated that many vegans expressed a favourable view regarding the affordability and practicability of adopting a vegan lifestyle, particularly in a country such as India. A diverse array of dietary options, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, seeds, beans, and legumes, constitute the core components of a vegan diet. Additionally, as mentioned by Pabby, Bhagat, & Senthilmurugan (2022), it is noteworthy that a vegan diet accommodates the consumption of a wide spectrum of favourite foods, ranging from pizza to pastries, curry to cake, as long as these items are prepared using plant-based ingredients.

Both Jain and non-Jain vegans attached great importance to the concept of ethical concern. This shared perspective emphasised the ethical perspective of their vegan lifestyle and it remained consistent among the participants. This congruence between their self-perception and the prevailing themes underscores the unified perspective governing their motivation and attitude towards veganism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings have revealed a striking commonality in motivation between these two groups: a shared ethical concern for the welfare of animals. Prominently, the exploitation of animals within the dairy industry emerged as a pivotal catalyst for their adoption of veganism. This motivation subsequently engendered a profound attitudinal shift, leading to the integration of veganism into their daily lives.

This study has a few limitations. The limited time to conduct this study restricted the potential of the research overall. The primary difficulty in recruiting volunteers for this study was contacting vegans. The study's limitation lies in its small sample size of 13 participants, which may hinder the applicability of findings to broader contexts. The age group of the sample may also be a limitation on the interpretation of results, younger people may be more familiar with the concept of veganism and therefore, this would impact their perceptions of what it means in society. If the study were to be replicated it is recommended that the researchers balance the ages of participants.

In examining the comparative analysis between Jain vegans and non-Jain vegans, a consensus emerged, primarily centred on both behavioural and value-related aspects. Specifically, 92% of participants overwhelmingly viewed veganism as a lifestyle rather than a mere dietary choice. Consequently, their motivation for embracing veganism was consistently rooted in ethical considerations related to animal welfare. This ethical perspective constituted the common ground among participant responses, emphasising veganism as a lifestyle geared toward promoting animal welfare and mitigating animal suffering. This study addresses a critical gap in veganism literature by investigating motivational differences between Jain vegans and non-Jain vegans in India, making it the first of its kind to do so comprehensively.

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Spectacular Precarity: Revisiting Debord in the Downturn

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Abstract

This paper is a theoretical reflection on the idea of the spectacle as presented in the works of Guy Debord, and a rearticulation of the nature of the spectacle in a moment of precarity. I draw on the works of Berlant (2011) and McLanahan (2019) to give an outline of the present as a moment of precarity, of contingency and economic/life uncertainty, and draw the link between the concept of the spectacle in Debord and the fantasy of the good life presented by Berlant. I draw on the work of Lauren Berlant to argue that, even as it dwindles, the promise of normativity inherent in the fantasy of the good life still acts as the spectacular entrapment of our times. The fantasy, now of possessing some sort of normal life, even a ‘bad life’ functions on a relation of cruel optimism that converts base survival into endlessly deferred desire. The cunning of the spectacle, I argue, is no longer in the deceptively seductive grandeur of a commodity laundry catalogue but in the abject and rapid sway between meaningless trinkets of devalued leisure and the shrinking conditions of existence it sells to us as fantastic. From Wark (2019), I show how, in the long downturn, the spectacle reimposes upon survival needs “as if they were desires”. I focus here not on a particular object but on a litany of everyday experiences, taking the present as an archive of affects waiting to be unfolded.

Keywords: spectacle, precarity, desire, Debord, Berlant, good life fantasy.

Introduction

This paper is not driven by one line of argument, or a particular thesis statement. I am quite basically interested here in charting out the role of desire and dissatisfaction in the space of

everyday life. I am particularly driven by McClanahan (2019) and Berlant's (2011) works on contemporary neoliberalism/post-Fordism and the kind of precarious living it engenders. McClanahan's is a materialist account of the economic dispossession most people in the world today encounter, while Berlant's is an affective, almost poetic rendering of the impasse this moment puts us in. Berlant brings forth the power of fantasy that the commodity form engenders in a time of precarity – transforming bleakness into liveability through the promise of the commodity to soothe, to bring one closer to lost intimacies, to momentarily put at bay the contingencies involved in bare survival today. Re-reading Debord in our current times shows the endurance of his argument – of the absolute empty seduction of the commodity as the central ordering element of life under capital accumulation. In its inability to satisfy real needs, and in its ability to regenerate endlessly manufactured instances of momentary satisfaction, the spectacular commodity keeps us stuck in its failing promises, even as everything around us transforms rapidly. Taken together, they show us a portrait of the depth of bleakness involved in living in a contingent, commodified today.

My interest here is in making a connection between Berlant's argument and those of Guy Debord (2005) in *Society of the Spectacle*. In this paper, I am interested in revisiting Debord's notion of the spectacle and scoping out its peculiar way of functioning in the accelerated, precarious times of the present. Focusing on his idea of concentrated and diffuse spectacles, and the later notion of the integrated spectacle, I am hoping to trace in a general sense the strength of the spectacle as a mode of theorisation for the contemporary moment. I hope to show how the spectacle functions in the moment of precarity by converting survival needs into desire, transforming, as Berlant argues, normativity as the ultimate fantasy that keeps us attached to our bad lives. If the spectacle is the denial and estrangement of man through appearances, I am interested here in showing how the present moment, more than ever before, immerses us into diffuse images of our own creation – into a commodity world of respite, filled to the excess with trinkets, collectibles and useless services, as the conditions for living, even barely, disappear at an alarming rate.

Conceptualising Today: Uncertain, Precarious, Long

“The spectacle is the material expression of the separation and estrangement between man and man.” (Debord, 2005, p. 117)

In Apple TV's *Severance* (2022), we encounter separation personified. Hired by a large corporation, several people choose to ‘sever’ themselves into two sets of memories – the “person”, and the worker. Each working morning, the “person” enters an elevator and on reaching the severed floor of their workplace, forgets their personhood – they exist only as the worker; with no memory or temporal perception of the outside world, the worker only knows the inside (so termed the “innie”) – as a limited space and an endless now. The “outtie” (the outer Self), free from the burden of work, is expected to flourish, but they only just get by – living

isolated mundane days that blend into each other. The innie and the outtie are both at impasse, one of tyranny and another of mundaneness, yet when *innies* submit applications to their outer selves begging them to resign, every attempt is brutally rejected. Their life on the outside is not dazzling or exotic or even happy for the most part – they bear the marks of bruises they can’t explain, feelings in their chest whose memories they can’t access, todays that are wholly indistinguishable from yesterday – yet the outties carry on, or rather *stay stuck*, and order their own (double) suffering. The move in severance is the literal denial of self in service of some abstract desire – of appearing a certain kind of way, of living a certain kind of life. What kind of life might this be? It is certainly not the good life, not in the way we would traditionally imagine it; the characters in *Severance* are not motivated by some idea of suburban familial bliss, but by the bare hope of getting by, of encountering in their mundane routines some semblance of normalcy, of something even adjacent to it – a life of not falling through the cracks, what Berlant (2011) calls “the less-bad life” (p. 172).

In some sense, *Severance* is a powerful allegory for a collective today. A repetitive stasis oriented towards an always out-of-reach desire, post-Fordist subjectivity, as Berlant (2011) terms it, is caught in an eternal (economic) present – of always working, always desiring, and never getting anywhere. If in *Severance*, the moment of spectacular estrangement of man from himself is presented literally through a split between the person and the worker, in the present reality this estrangement is presented through diffusion – of a moment where there is no meaningful difference between the time of working and the time of leisure. McKenzie Wark (2013) shows how the abundant interconnectivity of technology renders even the commute to work a time/space for productivity, where what was earlier interstitial becomes official. The device makes work always possible – at any time, any day, in any remote part of the world – and so impossible to leave behind. We are marked not only by a time where the working day colonises previously workless hours, but where entire industries function on evaporating the boundaries of a working day. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the gig economy – wrapped in the language of freedom and flexibility, gig work is the large-scale manifestation of anytime/anywhere availability of productivity today. Food deliveries, groceries, parcels travel endlessly on the backs of people that work endless hours; not as much as they *want* to as is its great promise, but as often as they can, as close to *always* as possible. And unlike the torturous stability of the job in *Severance*, where they can’t seem to leave work even when parts of them want to, gig work and the expanding labour market today is driven precisely by instability – by the possibility of at any time being out of work. This precarious unsettledness is the hallmark of neoliberalism McClanahan (2019) argues, where for an expanding number of people, “everything on which life depends is profoundly economic, precisely insofar as it is uncertain, precarious, and without guarantee.” (p. 121)

For McClanahan (2019), the material experience of the shrinking conditions of possibility under neoliberalism marks the historical end of a fantasy of “entrepreneurial ambition and

self-appreciation” (p. 127). The common knowledge, the felt experience of this fantasy’s end should drive us, she argues, to a counter-consciousness poised against the systems that reproduce our precarity. Yet, as the *outties* of *Severance* show us, knowledge of suffering is not immediately a way out of it, and the end of one form of fantasy is not the end of fantasy in and of itself. The severed stay attached to their less-bad lives, the gig worker celebrates her faux freedom, and today continues as an impasse. For Berlant (2011), the impasse is a “holding station” where interruptions in the reproduction of life can be adapted to – therefore a space for a recalibration of desire, of accepting, however truly bleak it may be, a new normal (p. 199)

It is possible to conceptualise here, through Berlant (2011), the normal as a mode of desire that is both aspirational and soothing. If the material reality of the present is marked by economic precarity and instability, the image of the normal is the stable, evolving bribe that keeps you going, or at the very least, keeps you from going against. It is the ordering principle towards which life’s energies are directed, and it is the possibility of its fulfilment that soothes us when precarity is felt. “Promised” normativity is then the “soothing bustle” that drowns out the “dread of an eternal present” (Berlant, 2011, p. 180) Yet, the cunning of the normal, is that it is always promised and never actualised. “Normal” as a state of being to be desired is unstable and illusory because it functions not just on the (already difficult) fulfilment of material needs (food, shelter) but on “hegemonic promises of social belonging” (Berlant, 2011, p. 166) – an appearance in relation to the appearance of others, in relation to the appearance of things. The cruel optimism of the present, Berlant shows, is based in no small part on attachments to the “promise of the object” and to the “promise of exchange value” (Berlant, 2011, p. 28-40) – it is a constantly regenerative and unfulfillable desire where “survival and fantasy” become indistinguishable from each other (Berlant, 2011, p. 178). Normal is then not just a house and a meal, but a certain kind of meal, a certain kind of house – Wark (2013) again illustrates this in the promise of suburban housing, where people are willing to give up something in time (in the commute to the working) for “more space, a sense of higher status and the feeling of security” (p. 8) in the suburbs. The house, once possessed however, is marked by the lack of time one has to spend in it. And when the interstitial time of the commute is taken up by the official, man is left with neither time nor space, only dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction then breeds a new kind of image, a new hegemonic promise, a new, temporary soothing thing to be desired.

And today there is no shortage of images, of things to be desired. For however bleak the material conditions of the present may be – smaller houses, ecological crises, mounting debt – it is filled to the brim with things. Even in the shrinking conditions of existence, the possibilities of desire are endless; services of convenience – a pizza delivered to your door at 3 am, an at-home massage at 8, groceries delivered in 10 minutes, typified ways of looking – the clean girl aesthetic, hypebeast streetwear, normcore fashion, trinkets promising the organisation of life – smartwatches, calorie-counting apps, increasingly complex closet organisers and so on. Every facet of existence is invaded by objects not just to be used or had, but to be displayed – the

smartwatch matters less in what it does for you than how it appears on the wrist, Air Jordans don't just symbolise the possession of a rare thing (though this is a part of it) but an exclusive social belonging to a community of "sneakerheads". We are then in not just a "maelstrom of equivalent images" (Wark, 2013, p. 5), but in a series of social relations mediated by images – a separation between labour and desire (images of real objects produced through labour) so complete and imposing that desire appears as autonomous and omnipotent, between us and also beyond; and labour, the fragility of our real relations in the world disappears almost completely from view. Like the hollow cries of the *innie* to be freed, the precariousness of existence appears as an inexplicable bruise, a vague feeling in the chest, best ignored in favour of autonomous, omnipotent desire. Debord says of this situation,

As long as necessity is socially dreamed, dreaming will remain a social necessity. The spectacle is the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep (2005, p. 12)

So, when McClanahan (2019) asks us to feel out the textured fragility of our precarious life formed by "experiences in the unemployment line and the student loan office and the pawnshop" (p. 127), the problem is not one of merely feeling (as she suggests, we always anyway do) but of remembering, of staying with the feeling. When desire acts a soothing drowning-out of dread, and touch and what can be materially felt (texture) are so subjugated to untouchable appearance in a world that is pre-eminently oriented by images, feeling is always under the threat of forgetting, of drowning, of falling back to sleep. To move from abstract feeling to continuing consciousness requires not just an experience of precarity and fragility of everyday life but of the nature of desire that is so enmeshed within precarity, and indeed that stultifies its sharp edges to a "steady hum of liveable crisis ordinariness" (Berlant, 2011, p. 10). For Debord (2005), this requires an examination of the "permanent opium war" (p. 22) waged against us in the everyday – what he, so many years ago, termed, "the spectacle".

I have started and ended this section with some references to Debord, and a tangential reference to what we may consider spectacular about modern society. Indeed, Wark's theorizations on the present condition of everyday life is a reimagining of Debord's conception of the spectacle, what she calls the disintegrated spectacle. In essence, however, this section has been a brief charting out of some of the feelings that may govern the present – an elongated experience of the present, a shrinking of material conditions, a burgeoning of image-dreams, and the oppressive play between desire and dissatisfaction. In the forthcoming section, I want to show how Debord's idea of the spectacle, of capital accumulated to the point of image, is useful still in the present day, to explain our estrangement from our real conditions of existence, our real relations to each other, from our real needs and our real, unseparated selves. Writing 20 years after "Society of the Spectacle" was first published, Debord (1998) argued that the "most important change" in the interim period lay "in the very continuity of the spectacle" (p. 5). The following section then is a

trace of the continuity of the spectacle, not as a stable totalising force, but as a process of continuous, adapting subjugation under capital, see how Debord's central claims might find currency in the condition of the present as it has been laid out in this section.

The Spectacle: Concentrated, Diffuse, (Dis)Integrated

The spectacle, for Debord, is the capital's sophisticated attack on everyday life. It is the death of direct experience, where our true intimacy with the world is obscured by an intimacy with appearance. His theorisation then is an attempt to lay bare the "human" loss, or the loss of humanity that underpins the seemingly endless expansion of the economy. And it was at the precise time of his writing, in the 50s and the 60s, that this expansion of the economy did seem particularly endless. Debord was responding to the newfound prosperity of the industrialised world in its Fordist era, where it had "moved beyond the stage of scarcity" to enter a moment of affluence, in which the workers could seemingly partake (Penner, 2015, p. 166). For Debord, the sceptical question was about the nature of this affluence; it was not for him an increase in human capacity, but merely an abundance of commodities (Penner, 2015). For him, the restructuring of daily life in France in the 50s towards a shiny consumer capitalism signalled the loss of *a people* in favour of an atomised mass of consumers, i.e., the lonely crowd (Jappe, 1999).

Despite our material and temporal distance from France in the mid-twentieth century, this lonely crowd still follows us everywhere we go. Crowds that are ordered around isolating, incessantly renewing technologies extend like the length of a highway holding thousands of people, separated as they are in their individual containers. At the concert, the cinema, the stadium the image of the star (or the team), the "superficial object of an apparent life", wraps around the individual and separates them from the seat next to them (Debord, 2005, p. 29). At the supermarket, we interact not with other people, but "one of millions of identical boxes of Frosted Flakes" (Penner, 2015, p. 167). Debord (2005) says of this, "Spectators are linked solely by their one-way relationship to the very centre that keeps them isolated from each other" (p. 16)

Today the continuity of the spectacle is also in the loss of this identifiable centre; the spectacle disintegrates and diffuses into the entire social landscape. In social media, we again meet at a stream of images, which engender their own, more complete isolation – where earlier we were mediated by the same image, presented to us as same (identical boxes of cereal), the image is now presented seemingly just for us, each "for you page" presenting a unique, customised flow of images, based on some abstracted knowledge of our (spectacular) desires.

Separation then is "the alpha and omega of the spectacle" – it marks not only the separation of people from each other – people who can now only meet at the site of the commodity image, but first also of people from the commodities they produce (Debord, 2005, p. 13). It abstractifies and alienates individual labour, eliminating therefore "direct personal communication between the

producers and any comprehensive sense of what they are producing” (Debord, 2005, p. 14). The commodity now free from its attachment to reality can appear now as autonomous and independent, merged in a relentless stream of other autonomous images, that speak to us unilaterally from a place both beyond and between us. The worker therefore produces the world that is alien to them, and the more they produce, the more alien the world becomes. The more alien the world becomes, the more the spectacular hold of images engenders the worker as passive consumer. The stream of commodities as images is the promise of goodness stacked upon the dispossession of the worker, where ‘good’ is fixed onto ‘the Good’ (Wark, 2013), life rests on what Berlant calls the promise of the object. Debord expresses this sentiment in a strikingly similar way when he says,

The image of blissful social unification through consumption merely postpones the consumer’s awareness of the actual divisions until his next disillusionment with some particular commodity. Each new product is ceremoniously acclaimed as a unique creation offering a dramatic shortcut to the promised land of total consummation (2005, p. 34)

Yet, the function of the promise, as Berlant has shown, is its inability to ever fully be realised. The satisfaction of the product similarly is fraudulent for Debord because the product once possessed reveals its poverty and so each individual image held up by the spectacle is flashed only for an elongated moment, then seamlessly replaced with another.

...the object that was prestigious in the spectacle becomes mundane as soon as it is taken home by its consumer – and by all its other consumers... Meanwhile, some other object is already replacing it as representative of the system and demanding its own moment of acclaim. The fraudulence of the satisfactions offered by the system is exposed by this continual replacement of products and of general conditions of production...entities that have brazenly asserted their definitive perfection nevertheless end up changing, and only the system endures. (2005, p. 35)

This is not a failure of the spectacle but its precise nature. The showcasing of endlessly possible desire acts as an “incessant justification” of the conditions of production of the spectacle, and its inability to fully fulfil the desires of its own making is in fact what keeps the spectacle going – satisfaction is always deferred onto some other product (Jappe, 1999, p. 7). The spectacle’s chief act then is the impoverishment of everyday life – by manufacturing desires that cyclically create their own dissatisfactions. Debord (2005) calls this augmented survival, where we “equate satisfaction with a survival that expands according to its own laws” (p. 22). In the spectacle, “consumable survival must constantly expand” to gild, but never transcend its poverty (ibid)

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In our strange time of a precarity filled with things, we can sense a fascinating merging of these spectacular modes – a fading dream of our wholesale survival interspersed with a catalogue of endless choice: food deliveries, sneakers, Nutribullets, the fashion of a new Barbie film – a world of a thousand trinkets; and the promise of a home, of non-toxic water, breathable air, the normalcy of bare survival. Debord could see this emerging when 20 years after publishing his original work, he offered up a follow-up hypothesis, that of the integrated spectacle. In the integrated spectacle, no part of life-reality is unspectacular: “When the spectacle was concentrated, the greater part of surrounding society escaped it; when diffused, a small part; today, no part. The spectacle has spread itself to the point where it now permeates all reality” (Debord, 1998).

The display of power now occurs not at the site of one individual as in the concentrated spectacle, but in an occulted state, where there is no one known leader or clear ideology, the ideology is merely of the spectacle and its leaders are constantly replacing themselves, diffuse in a way of the expanding reach of “media status”. The loss of real ability means anyone can be anything – “A financier can be a singer, a lawyer a police spy, a baker can parade his literary tastes, an actor can be president” (Debord, 1998). Trump can go from failed businessman to reality TV star to President, and work not in service of a manifest ideology, but of spectacular living. The integration of the state with economy in the spectacle in a world of occult leadership reaches today its most sophisticated form, where tech billionaires, lawmakers, philanthropes, unspecified celebrities merge into an undistinguishable mass of desire-production, both visible and invisible as they tuck into their Davos retreats. This is the generalised secrecy of the integrated spectacle that Debord speaks of – what he feels to be its most vital operation. Everyone sees it, is in on the secret, yet is powerless to act. In a time where every grotesque fragment of life is seen via a plethora of media, the spectacle is hyper-visible, but it's trick is to engender, Debord argues, a confidentiality that those who know are in some privileged position of knowing, even when the knowledge of what is revealed may be false. The isolation the spectacle produces, heightened as it is by an image experience that is now curated just for you, is the guardian of its secret – in a world where nothing is to be had, a vague knowledge of your own domination becomes a prized possession. And the knowledge the spectacle throws at us is always only fragmented, of only our life- of the experience in the unemployment line, or the student loan office or pawnshop, but keeps concealed the relations between things, the precarity of the whole. The severed feel the feeling of their own unhappy lives but their moment of movement comes in realising the unhappiness that binds them all equally – they see not just their

own hand, but finally the rules of the game. Under the spectacle, the rules are always obscured and importantly, always changing.

I referenced earlier his notion of augmented survival – an always expanding survival based on the spectacle’s internal logic. In the long downturn that confronts us today, it is hard to imagine survival as always expanding when so much of the world’s population lives under economic exigencies that were perhaps unimaginable a few decades ago. Here Berlant’s idea of the less-bad life seems particularly compelling; the augmentation of survival today is not its expansion but a strange lateral movement where even the most basic existential needs – a place to rest, a time to rest, a meal to eat, and the air to breathe are shifted to the realm of desire. The need to be normal, the promise of an okay life become powerful opiates in themselves. The spectacle is in its moment of disintegration, says Wark: “...in these chastened times the project is different. Having failed our desires, this world merely renames the necessities it imposes as if they were desires” (2013, p. 9).

In so many cunning ways, the need for wages, for survival, for a stable job that isn’t there becomes the desire for freedom, for gig work, for entrepreneurship, for self-mastery. In India, where stable employment grows scarcer by the day, we were told eloquently of the promise of *pakora* employment – to consider romantically the employment of the roadside stall worker, relabelled now as an entrepreneur, whose freedom and grit should inspire desire. The gig worker becomes the formalised relative of the *pakora* entrepreneur, delivering, as I mentioned earlier, the world on their back. But if you can’t buy a nice house on the gig worker’s current wages, maybe you can buy a faster bike for a quick turnaround, a better appearance for customer satisfaction, download four more apps for more mileage, spend your weekends, and also your nights until every moment of life, every aspect of personality is captured by the precarious spectacle,

...permanent self-denial is the price the individual pays for the tiniest bit of social status. Such an existence demands a fluid fidelity, a succession of continually disappointing commitments to false products. It is a matter of running hard to keep up with the inflation of devalued signs of life. (Debord, 1998)

And as the bigger desires remain so closely out of reach, fulfillable desire downgrades to the world of “trinkets” – of small, inconsequential, temporary joys that gild the expanding poverty of life like magnets adorning an empty fridge. These tiny commodities fix us in an eternal present where trends and images ceaselessly reappear, and the world uncritically returns to “the same short list of trivialities” (Debord, 1998). In a time where “rest” as a time and a place is greatly reduced (Berlant, 2011), the commodity, in all its triviality, becomes itself a place of rest, of respite from the dispossession the world produces. Nowhere is this more apparent than on social media – the same phone that Wark argues gives up “free time” to work, also becomes the place

of momentary free time when everything else is work. Leisure, the separated (severed) time, where the worker “finds himself seemingly treated like a grownup...in his new role as a consumer” (Debord, 2015, p. 21), is now not a continuous duration of time, but a collection of diffuse moments of scrolling – on the bus ride home, in line at the student loan office...in between the dread of everyday life, the movement of a scroll, of swiping left and right, a joke, a meme, a friend’s tweet, a controversial podcast, an “aesthetically” curated Instagram shop is the soothing, lulling, forgetting bustle of liveability.

In its most disintegrated moment, the spectacle doesn’t even need to produce the goods and images – those the cushions or trinkets of the precarious present that keep us bound to it; this task is also outsourced to the worker – the Instagram shop, the funny tweet, the podcast, and the profile to swipe left on are all created by its loyal subjects.

The culture industries are now the vulture industries, which act less as producers of images for consumption than as algorithms that manage databases of images that consumers swap between each other—while still paying for the privilege...Spectators are now obliged to make images and stories for each other that do not unite those spectators in anything other than their separateness (Wark, 2013, p. 6)

As comforting as it may be, inactivity is never freedom for Debord. It is neither a liberation of work itself nor a liberation from the world shaped by this kind of work. None of the activity stolen by work can be regained by submitting to what that work has produced (Debord, 2005, p.15). The disintegrated spectacle sees the absolute expansion of this productive inactivity, immersive in its momentary relief, even as every other avenue of liveability devolves into uncertainty.

This modulation of time that disintegrates the boundaries between labour and free time, into discontinuous fragments of present, degraded enjoyments is at the heart of the spectacle’s transformation of our lives’ relations in unstable times. Precarity, Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006) argue “is a form of exploitation which operates primarily on the level of time” (para. 5). A moment of precarity, of profound economic instability is a making fluid of “the continuum of everyday life” (Tsianos & Papadopoulos, 2006, para. 5) insofar as the present of productivity extends endlessly, and the future becomes an almost unimaginable contingency. As the accelerated modes of capitalist accumulation degrade the conditions of economic reproduction, so to do they degrade the possible reproduction of life – what remains is a mobile, productive present surfeit with “cushions of enjoyment” (Berlant, 2011, p. 3) and an always receding possibility that one may possess a life that could meaningfully add up to something.

The question of course remains of where one may go from here – how does the *innie* escape their timeless subjugation? The problem of resistance has perhaps been under addressed here but I end

with some speculative notes towards interruption, memory and possibility. The task of the spectacular subject for Debord is simple – to constantly confront the givenness of our conditions – to challenge both our recessions and our enjoyments through the meaningful creation of interruptions, what he calls *detournement*. Detournement, as Penner (2015) describes it, is the kind of confrontation that allows us to “recognize the inherent instability of words, concepts, and norms, and, in particular, their creative potential to playfully reconstruct them” (p. 175). The precaritized subject of course embodies repeatedly in their contingent everyday, the inherent instability of the world writ large as a ‘vague feeling in the chest’. The task of arriving at recognition from pure embodiment (of staying with the feeling) is a task of maximising, as Judith Butler (2004) argues, our relationalities – with those we see as Other, with ourselves (in whom we may see the Other), with our griefs and so also our desires. To recognise the relations of instability that mark the unemployment line, the student loan office. The pawnshop requires both the memory and the grief of our individual and our collective desires – of stable employment, of education, of being debt-free. The task for the precaritized subject to see creative potential, to imagine otherwise – other worlds and other times – requires first being undone by the worlds and times we have lost. Recognition and reconstruction require from us one of our few remaining belongings, precisely what the *innies* of Severance lack – memory, and so also the power to mourn what we remember as having lost. New imaginations may then emerge from its wake.

Concluding Remarks

So, the spectacle is not just a laundry catalogue of images, but in reality, also of loss: of time, place, of real needs, of labour, of our relations to ourselves, to each other, to the world at large. Moving from the spectacle is realising the truly binding loss that separateness unites us with, and situating it, playfully, in the everyday – in all of its interstitial crevices. A longer paper would be served by an exploration of Debord’s elaborate strategies of resistance, rooted in his work with the Letterists and Situationists International, and how they can be applied to the present. However, in this paper I have focused mainly on using his central concept of the spectacle to first say something about the present, and the bleak and promising ways in which we encounter it.

As the dream of the good life fades, as its mask no longer allows the whole of precarity to be hidden – we find ourselves at an impasse, a disturbance in time and money, an ongoing present in which we must figure ourselves out, and our responses to the disturbance, i.e., how we adapt. The spectacle’s force is also in its precise ability to adapt – to change the rules of game so that life itself, even the bad version of it, becomes the primary desire; everything else we get is just a generous bonus. The spectacle then is that mode in the impasse which “destroys its subjects” and “finds a way to appear as merely a steady hum of liveable crisis ordinariness” (Berlant, 2011, p. 10). I have explored here, mainly through Debord, the spectacle as an adaptive process of capital that acts as an incessant justification of itself by rendering the world as appearance, and man as

estranged from himself. I have tried then to trace how it stultifies the material experience of the moment of precarity today through a changing cycle of desire and dissatisfaction. When we feel, we don't know exactly what we feel, when we know, we know only in fragments and the whole remains obscured, when we are dissatisfied, we are only directed to some other devalued desire – this is the cycle of the spectacle today.

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Ethiopian Military Rule: Impact On International Engagements

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Abstract

This study explores the governance of Ethiopia from 1974 onwards, when the country's Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by a military junta referred to as the Derg, ending years of monarchical rule and leaving Ethiopia with a military dictatorship. This research paper analyses Ethiopia's international engagements under the Derg's military rule via an examination of four specific issues- the Ogaden War with Somalia, the rise of Eritrea as an independent nation, the role of international organisations, and the impact of the Derg's rule on Ethiopia's economy.

By delving into the complexities of military governance and the several major issues that plagued Ethiopia during this time politically, economically, and internationally, this research project finds that Ethiopia's period of military rule was a key point in the country's allegiance transition from the Western Bloc to the Eastern, with the reasons for the same being primarily ideological in nature in order to validate the Derg's Marxist-Leninist approach to its regime structure, its ideology and the economic structure that it sought to establish for Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopia's international engagements during the Derg rule bore no fruit for the country in the long run, showcasing only some short-run benefits such as momentary periods of positive economic growth and territorial retention through the Ogaden War. This study demonstrates the challenges of implementing Marxist-Leninism, particularly after the reduction of ideological and material support from a major power, like the Soviet Union. The understanding obtained would be instrumental in comprehending the evolution of modern Ethiopia's international engagements.

Keywords: Ethiopia, military rule, international engagements, Ogaden War, Eritrea, African Union

Introduction

On September 12, 1974, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a coup d'état by the Derg, a military junta known officially as the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC). This happened in the wake of increasing public outrage against Emperor Selassie for a variety of issues ranging from a lack of action taken during the 1973 Wollo famine that killed thousands to the military protesting against shortages of food and water. In addition, the military demanded higher pay, and educational institutions demanded educational reform as well as higher pay for teachers and professors (Meredith, 2011).

The Derg was created particularly in reaction to the March 1973 protests against the government calling for a separation of Church and State, wherein Selassie ordered a military crackdown on protestors and refused to cede to any demands. As they grew in numbers and power, the Derg gradually dismantled the entire imperial government structure. This involved attacking Selassie on various platforms, such as the local radio for negligence and corruption, and threatening government officials with asset confiscation if they did not give themselves up voluntarily. All of this led to Selassie being informed of his dethronement on September 12, 1974, and his imprisonment in the Grand Palace (Meredith, 2011).

After a long period of political instability due to infighting within the Derg for the seat of power, Mengistu Haile Mariam emerged as the leader of the Derg and hence became the President of Ethiopia in 1977. He advocated for a Marxist-Leninist ideology, wherein land redistribution would be key to the country's prosperity. Under Mengistu, Ethiopia was ruled by the Derg from 1977 to 1987, post which it was ruled by a reformed version of the Derg, called the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, retaining the same Marxist-Leninist ideology. This was dissolved in 1991, which can be marked as the end of military rule in Ethiopia (Crummey et al., 2023).

The Derg's rule plays an important part in the history of Ethiopia as well as the entire Horn of Africa, affecting the geopolitical dynamics of the region. Its dissolution in 1991 led to the installation of a transitional government in Ethiopia led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and, perhaps most prominently, the independence of Eritrea and the establishment of their government under the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This overall period of military rule is referred to as the Ethiopian Civil War, which was a major turning point in

Ethiopia's history. It involved the demise of the monarchy, long periods of economic volatility, geographical changes in the country's territory, and changes in how Ethiopia was perceived internationally, eventually leading to the existence of Ethiopia and Eritrea as they are known today.

In light of the sheer importance of the Horn of Africa to international trade, it is crucial to understand the countries in the region and their history. Furthermore, studying Derg rule in Ethiopia specifically allows for a specific, case-based understanding of how military rule can potentially impact foreign policy, making it relevant to the analysis of other military regimes as well. This research project seeks to delve deeper into the Derg's rule in Ethiopia, analysing its impact on various facets of the country's international engagements.

Aim of Research / Research Question:

To analyse and discuss Ethiopia's international engagements as a result of the Provisional Military Administrative Council's (Derg's) military rule.

Research Design and Literature Review

The main objective of the research paper is to present the effect of Derg's military rule on Ethiopia's international engagements. The paper seeks to do so by focusing on a diverse range of specific issues pertaining to military rule during the Ethiopian Civil War. The issues that will be focused on are the Ogaden War, the rise of Eritrea, the role of international organisations in terms of a Derg-ruled Ethiopia, and the economic aspects of Derg rule. The Ogaden War and Eritrea's independence will be used as case studies in order to understand Ethiopia's international engagements during these crucial time periods in its history involving the Derg while also exploring the approach that international organisations opted for in terms of Ethiopia and providing an economic overview of the country under the Derg so as to supply further information necessary to draw a comprehensive conclusion, achieving the aim of this research paper.

Much has been written concerning the Ogaden War and its effects on Ethiopia and Somalia, with a helpful piece of literature contributing to this particular research paper being "Ethiopian foreign policy and the Ogaden War: the shift from "containment" to "destabilisation," 1977–1991" by Belete Belachew Yihun for the Journal of Eastern African Studies. The article focuses on the Derg's efforts to prevent Somalia from claiming Ogaden, the immediate post-war period and its effects on both nations, the destabilisation of Somalia, and the involvement of other countries, particularly great powers at the time, such as the Soviet Union and the USA (Yihun, 2014).

Similarly, Eritrea's independence has always been a major topic of discussion, with the literature being used in the preliminary research for this particular paper being "The Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict and the Search for Peace in the Horn of Africa" by Terrence Lyons for the publication "Review of African Political Economy." The article serves as excellent background into the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea involving independence and also provides insights post the independence of Eritrea regarding difficulties in political transition, overall instability in the Horn of Africa caused by Eritrean Independence, and the involvement of the international community (Lyons, 2009).

However, when understanding Ethiopia's reputation with the international community during the Derg rule, it is also important to address its engagements with international organisations, most notably the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which later evolved into the African Union (AU). In a US Army War College Strategic Report, Brigadier Joseph K. Nkaisserry wrote about the ties between Derg-ruled Ethiopia and the OAU/AU, as well as its role in the Ogaden War. This report provides important insight into the OAU's mission as an international organisation, its leaning towards Ethiopia, and how this inclination effectively undermined its role in Africa as a whole (Nkaisserry, 1997).

Regarding the economic effects of the Derg's rule, Alemaheyu Geda wrote a chapter entitled "The Political Economy of Growth in Ethiopia" for the book *"The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960-2000: Country Case Studies."* This chapter provides immense detail on the evolution of Ethiopia's economy, particularly highlighting the instability and changes that took place during the Derg regime. These insights provide crucial background and analytical insights into the relationship between the economic changes that took place under the Derg's rule and its impact on the country's international engagements (Ndulu et al., 2015).

The literature review dealt with select literature available on the Derg's rule in Ethiopia, focusing specifically on the Ogaden War, the independence of Eritrea, the approach of international organisations towards Ethiopia, and the general impact of Derg rule from an economic perspective and its connection to the country's international engagements. This research paper aims to focus on achieving a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectivity of the aforementioned issues by analysing the Ogaden War and the independence of Eritrea as case studies, while also studying the manner in which international organisations approached African issues involving Ethiopia and provided an economic overview of the Derg's rule.

Analysis of Issues

1. The Ogaden War (1977-1978)

Ogaden is an arid region in eastern Ethiopia, primarily consisting of barren plains and a major river called the Shebeli, as well as the origins of the Genale River. Home to pastoralists, what makes the Ogaden region important is the presence of oil and gas fields, which have not been utilised or developed as a result of territorial conflict concerning the region between Ethiopia and its eastern neighbour, present-day Somalia (McKenna et al., 2018). In the 19th Century, Ethiopia and Somaliland, as an Italian protectorate, both claimed the Ogaden region, with Ethiopia's Emperor Menilek II using his victory against the Italians in the 1896 Battle of Adwa to occupy the region (Meredith, 2011).

Although several minor battles took place between the two, the Ogaden War refers specifically to the large-scale military conflict between Derg-ruled Ethiopia and Somalia over Ogaden, which began with Somalia's invasion of the region. The deposition of the Emperor and Somalia's military support from the Soviet Union at the time gave them a reason to believe that it would be an opportune moment for them to claim Ogaden, despite the condemnation of their aggression by the Organisation for African Unity and their attempts at diplomatic resolution (Nkaissery, 1997). The battle ended with Ethiopian victory as the Somali force was forced to retreat, causing increased social unrest in Somalia, which led to the start of the Somali Rebellion and, hence, the Somali Civil War (Yihun, 2014).

A notable aspect of the battle would be the alliances that were broken and formed in its process. Prior to the Derg's reign, Emperor Selassie was known for his inclination towards the USA, particularly under President John F. Kennedy. This was due to the USA's economic assistance towards Ethiopia and the American Peace Corps program that worked with Ethiopia to develop agriculture, infrastructure, educational facilities, and more. Several books and journals were published to celebrate the countries' relationship, such as *Point Four*, a quarterly newsletter on USA and Ethiopia relations (Derillo, 2015).

When the Derg took over Ethiopia, relations between the USA and Ethiopia weakened, in part due to the Derg's Marxist-Leninist approach to establishing a socialist state, which contradicted the USA's anti-communist ideology and created a point of contention. However, the ideological differences do not equate to the USA completely abandoning Ethiopia; in the summer of 1977, when the Somali invasion of the Ogaden region was just beginning, Ethiopia received F5-Es from the USA, the best fighter bomber jets available at the time. This demonstrates that although the Derg takeover did impact the strength of the country's relations with the USA, there was still some semblance of a working relationship (Pettersen, 1986).

However, this is not to say that the Ogaden War did no damage to Ethiopia-US relations. Before the conflict, it was revealed that the Soviet Union would be assisting Ethiopia with arms supplies and sending them around 30 tanks, which can be attributed to the ideological similarities of their respective governments at the time. This paved the way for an increase in overall cooperation

between the two nations, resulting in a turbulent relationship between the Soviet Union and Somalia which further led to Somalia seeking aid from the USA instead. The USA agreed to send Somalia arms but doubled back on this promise upon greater awareness of the Ogaden situation, with President Carter sharing concerns about the Soviet Union's involvement in the region, as well as that of Middle Eastern countries and India (Yihun, 2014). This move by the U.S. was seen as antagonistic towards Ethiopia's socialist revolution and was detrimental to U.S.-Ethiopia relations in the Derg Era (Pettersen, 1986).

As a result of perceived betrayal by the USA, it can be argued that the Derg continued to pivot towards governments that shared ideological similarities, such as the Soviet Union. In the context of the Ogaden War, another major ally of Derg-ruled Ethiopia was Cuba under the reign of Fidel Castro, who also espoused a similar Marxist-Leninist approach to a socialist state. Cuba had already attempted to mediate diplomatic negotiations between Ethiopia and Somalia in March 1977 to prevent a full-scale war, to no avail (Kaufman, 1977). Cuba chose to support Ethiopia in the conflict, a decision that can be largely attributed to ideological similarities and Fidel Castro's perception that Somalia was shying away from socialism. To support Ethiopia in reclaiming Ogaden, Cuba sent approximately 15,000 of their own troops led by General Arnold Ochoa, later also sending tanks and playing a decisive role in the final Ethiopian counterattack that forced Somalia to retreat from the region (Lockyer, 2006).

Other communist nations at the time also offered Ethiopia assistance during the war, namely South Yemen, North Korea and East Germany, who were focused on military assistance and training resources (Yihun, 2014). It is also worth noting that India, a country that, at the time, followed closely in the ideological footsteps of the Soviet Union in the shaping of its economic policy, did not extend special support to Ethiopia during the Ogaden War, but they also did not break off their diplomatic relations, demonstrating consistency in their relationship wherein their working relationship remained essentially unaffected by the war (The Embassy of India in Addis Ababa, 2022).

This is not to say that all communist states banded together on the basis of ideology to support Ethiopia, considering that China at the time chose to support Somalia. This can also be considered a result of the Sino-Soviet rivalry of the time, although this primarily consisted of economic support rather than direct military intervention (Yihun, 2014). Nevertheless, the Ogaden War played a large part in shaping the geopolitics of the Horn; it can be understood solely on the basis of this conflict that ideology was significant in developing stronger relationships with other communist states of the time considering Derg rule, particularly the Soviet Union and Cuba. However, it also had an adverse effect on the country's relationship with the USA, hence marking a notable shift in the country's big power allegiance. In addition, this was not the case with China, as its rivalry with the Soviet Union at the time outweighed any

ideological similarities with Ethiopia, hence presenting an important exception to the argument that ideology played a major role in the alliances made and broken during this conflict.

2. Rise of Eritrea

After colonisation by Italy, Eritrea was made a British protectorate from the end of World War 2 till 1951, post which it was unclear what was to be done with Eritrea, with the British suggesting that the region be divided on the basis of religion, with the Christian areas going to Ethiopia and the Muslim areas going to Sudan (Kendie, 2005). Ethiopia, on the other hand, had always claimed sovereignty over Eritrea. The region was important to Ethiopia as it provided them with a coastline and the Port of Massawa, hence playing a crucial role in the country's economic growth and development by providing them with a point for sea-borne trade as well as headquarters for their now-defunct Ethiopian Navy. Eritreans themselves were greatly divided on being independent or unifying with Ethiopia, with opinions showcasing patterns amongst social groups. Christians tended to support unification, whilst the Muslim population favoured independence. This can be associated with the lack of separation of the Church and the state in Ethiopia during Emperor Selassie's rule, which angered non-Christians in the country (Meredith, 2011).

In an effort to resolve the issue, the United Nations decided in a General Assembly meeting that Eritrea would join Ethiopia to form the Federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1952, which would last ten years. However, Eritrea's independence was never granted as per the directions of the UN, leading to Ethiopia gradually increasing its control over Eritrea and several attempts for Eritrean liberation led by the ELF or the Eritrean Liberation Front (Lyons, 2009). In 1959, the Ethiopian law code was completely imposed on Eritrea, banning political parties and encouraging censorship while also replacing Tigrinya and Arabic with Amharic as the official language. Finally, in 1962, the Eritrean assembly succumbed to pressure and voted in favor of the dissolution of the federation (Meredith, 2011).

Guerrilla attacks by Eritreans continued to take place, which kept being brutally suppressed by Ethiopia, leading to increased Eritrean anger. The same took place during the Derg's reign, however, in 1977, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) established itself as the main liberation group for the country, expelling the ELF and eventually defeating Ethiopian forces in Eritrea in May 1991, right as the Workers' Party of Ethiopia or the reformed Derg disbanded. Fighting continued to take place between Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, with the United Nations adopting Resolution 1177 condemning the use of force on both sides, and the organisation, along with the USA attempting to mediate peace talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Finally, in 1993, Eritrea was recognized as an independent country, leaving Ethiopia landlocked (Lyons, 2009).

The fight for Eritrea, combined with the Ogaden War, resulted in a high degree of geopolitical instability in the Horn. Derg-ruled Ethiopia continued to receive military support from the Soviet Union and Cuba to suppress Eritrean protests. However, the Eritrean independence movement received international diplomatic and military support as well, most notably from China, for a short period of time. Nevertheless, the Ogaden War and the Eritrean uprisings gradually wore down Ethiopian military capabilities even with significant support, resulting in a war of attrition between the Derg and Eritrean independence activists (Kilfe, 2014).

The Soviet Union withdrew their support at the end of the 1980s, informing Ethiopia that they would not be renewing their defence and cooperation agreement. This can be attributed to Mengistu's decision to ban the Ethiopian media from using the terms 'glasnost' and 'perestroika', which pertained to the Soviet policy of 'transparency and reconstruction' during the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev (Kilfe, 2014). This was a result of heavy censorship during the Derg's reign, as the government did not want to arouse rebellious sentiments amongst the general public. Furthermore, the Soviet policy of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' indicated a significant step away from communist ideology as they challenged the concepts of control over public expression, collectivism and the centrally planned economic model which were associated with communist states, hence weakening the Derg's ideological big power support. This greatly impacted the Derg's military capabilities, and showed that they were never strong enough on their own to handle a myriad of territorial issues alongside internal turmoil concerning who held the seat of power until the rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam (Kilfe, 2014). It also appears that although the USA did periodically pay attention to the instability in the Horn and attempt to mediate peace talks, it did not provide sustained attention to those issues or make a larger effort to intervene unlike the Soviet Union or China (Lyons, 2009).

Overall, Eritrea's independence movement and hard-won but eventual victory, demonstrate that the Derg was never capable of maintaining their territorial control without Soviet help, exposing a major weakness in their government. This weakness was further exacerbated when Mengistu converted the Derg to the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in order to appease the general public. They were highly discontented with the military rule but the change still failed to allow Mengistu to maintain power, providing the Eritrean independence movement with a greater advantage. This reshaped the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn, drawing international attention and landlocking Ethiopia, forcing it to resort to using Djibouti's port access for trade and greatly limiting the country's economic potential to this day.

3. International Organisations

Apart from being a member of the United Nations since 1945, Ethiopia was also one of the founding members of the African Union (AU) in 1963 under Emperor Selassie's monarchical rule, which was originally named the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Since then Ethiopia

has remained one of the organisation's most important members, with its headquarters being situated in Addis Ababa.

When the Derg overthrew the monarchy, the OAU/AU was unable to take any action against the military takeover, instead continuing to attend summits held in Addis Ababa and praising the Derg's hospitality (Reynolds, 2002). However, the organisation eventually pointed out the violence and gross human rights violations that took place in Ethiopia under military rule, particularly the murder of thousands who opposed the government, labelling it as the 'Ethiopian Red Terror' and setting it as a focus area for the organisation (African Union, 2016). However, the absence of volunteer armed forces like the United Nations, as well as Ethiopia's importance to the OAU/AU as one of the founding members, left the organisation with little to no means to actually expose the human rights issues taking place under the Derg rule.

Furthermore, the organisation greatly emphasised the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states to the point where they had adopted a strict policy of non-interference in the affairs of member states, greatly limiting its effectiveness in tackling human rights issues in member countries. One of the main goals of the OAU/AU has always been to prevent its members from being controlled by or overly reliant on world powers, particularly former colonial powers. However, it can be argued that it failed in this aspect, considering the case of the Ogaden War and the involvement of multiple countries, particularly the Soviet Union, as it supplied both Ethiopia as well as Somalia with arms for certain periods of time with the OAU/AU being unable to take any action. The organisation's incompetence in major issues prompted several criticisms worldwide, with some dubbing it the "dictators' club" (Reynolds, 2002).

With regard to the Ogaden War, Mengistu had made statements to both the OAU/AU and the United Nations when Somalia invaded Ogaden to take action against Somali aggression. He warned both organisations that if they failed to do so, they would suffer the same fate as the now-defunct League of Nations, which dissolved as a result of its incompetence during several invasions and conflicts (Ottaway, 1977). While both organisations condemned Somalia's actions and attempted to advocate for a diplomatic resolution, the OAU/AU eventually supported Ethiopia in receiving foreign military support to regain Ogaden. This technically contradicted the goal of the OAU/AU to reduce reliance on non-African countries, particularly major powers at the time (Nkaissery, 1997).

As observed, Ethiopia under the Derg's rule did little to further engage itself with the international community; it did not join any new international organisations during this time and focused on allying itself with countries that either supported or did not actively speak against the Derg's communist ideology. As seen thus far, this includes countries such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and India, with several high-level diplomatic visits and interactions taking place. It can be

argued that overall, the main international organisations that were concerned with Ethiopia during this time, namely OAU/AU and the United Nations, did little to intervene in the issues of Ogaden and Eritrea, hence largely leaving the Derg to their own devices. There also appears to have been little to no effort to tackle the human rights violations that took place during these conflicts, which can be associated with the United Nations not adequately prioritising the Horn of Africa during this time and the OAU/AU being majorly controlled by Ethiopia and hence, being ineffective in these scenarios. It can also be argued that the international community had little to no incentive during this time period to put forward significant efforts to resolve African issues unless there were opportunities presented to exert political influence or gain economically via means such as resource exploitation (Fayayo & Mngomezulu, 2019).

Therefore, it can be argued that Ethiopia took advantage of the international community's general lack of interest during this time in the Horn of Africa, along with taking advantage of its status as a founding member of the OAU/AU and the home of its headquarters in order to preserve Derg rule, thus playing into these organisations' general ineffectiveness in intervening and resolving issues.

4. The Impact of Derg Rule: An Economic Perspective

When the Derg assumed control of the Ethiopian government, one of their major priorities was economic restructuring involving the nationalisation of all means of production and creating economic policies guided by Marxism-Leninism, essentially making Ethiopia a communist state with the goal of redistribution of land to peasants. A key aspect of the Derg's domestic economic reform was the "Land to the Tiller" program, nationalising all rural land, abolishing tenancy, and giving more power to peasants. Although the government faced a lot of opposition, this program, in particular, received significant support (Geda, 2015).

In 1975, the Derg nationalised most key industries producing basic goods and services such as essentials, goods serving other industries, pharmaceuticals, and much more, which is argued to have scared off foreign investment in the country, with the National Bank of Ethiopia stating that private direct investment declined from 65 million birrs in 1974 to 12 million birrs in 1977 (Geda, 2015). It can hence be gauged that despite the land redistribution initiative, the Derg's reign is characterised by unstable economic growth. This is partly due to the initial political upheaval, as well as other factors such as the Ogaden War, counterattacks against Eritrean independence protesters, and a period of severe drought and the massive famine of 1983-1985, which affected 7.75 million people resulting in an increasing reliance on foreign aid and imports (Fassil, 2017). The famine led to the creation of charitable drives in Western nations, particularly the United Kingdom, where concerts were held to raise money that was to be distributed amongst NGOs operating in Ethiopia (Rieff, 2005). However, it was revealed that some of the NGOs in question were under the Derg's control, and the money was being used to fund their resettlement

programs, which were heavily emphasised as part of their land reform initiatives. This sparked international outrage due to the harsh conditions that resettled villagers were forced to face, such as the lack of medical attention in resettlement centres and familial separation (Rieff, 2005).

The Derg responded to its declining economy by announcing the National Revolutionary Development Campaign in 1978, wherein a ten-year plan was created to revitalize the economy by expanding agricultural and industrial output, which turned out to be a failure. In addition, other countries appeared to have become reluctant to provide aid to Ethiopia, such as the USA, particularly due to the aforementioned reasons pertaining to ideological differences (Geda, 2015). The economic situation in Ethiopia continued to grow in complexity and issues, particularly with the 1980s proving to be a difficult time not just for Ethiopia but for most communist governments around the world, most notably Ethiopia's key ally, the Soviet Union, which began to slowly move away from communism.

This resulted in a gradual reduction in aid from the Soviet Union as well, which presented itself in cutbacks of weapon deliveries and a lack of enthusiasm from the Soviet Union's end to continue any preexisting arms agreements, dealing a massive blow to Ethiopia economically as well as ideologically (Webber, 1992). To make matters worse, Ethiopia had already been facing difficulties on an international level, with the Ethiopian national currency (Birr) devaluing sharply during Derg rule by 142% from its pegged rate of 2.07 per US Dollar in October 1992 and falling trade ratios due to a high reliance on imports and lack of exports to make up for the same, performing far worse than the former monarchical government (Fassil, 2017)

In March 1990, Mengistu Haile Mariam made a shocking speech to the country acknowledging the failure of his socialist policies, proposing that Ethiopia move forward with a mixed economy, and advocating for increased private sector participation (L.A. Times Archives, 1990). It can, therefore, be understood that the Derg's reign posed severe economic difficulties for Ethiopia which were further aggravated by the unstable political climate both domestically as well as internationally, with agriculture and manufacturing being the worst affected sectors.

Although there were periods when the political and economic climate stabilised and Ethiopia witnessed increases in GDP, these increases were undercut by the aforementioned major issues that plagued the country during the Derg rule. In terms of the country's international engagements, this unstable economic climate that can be attributed to Derg's rule showcases the country's significant reliance on partners such as the Soviet Union for economic and ideological support, both of which dwindled over time, contributing to economic instability.

Interconnectivity of Issues

The four issues explored, namely the Ogaden War, the rise of Eritrea, the role of international organisations in terms of a Derg-ruled Ethiopia, and the economic aspects of Derg rule, all provide specific perspectives towards military rule in Ethiopia and its impact on the country's international engagements during that particular time period.

Detailing the activities of Derg-ruled Ethiopia during the Ogaden War has allowed for an understanding of the country's past, particularly its difficult relationship with Somalia as a result of the territorial conflict. It showcases how Ethiopia's authoritarian, Marxist-Leninist form of government played a crucial role in its ability to concentrate on retaining control over the Ogaden region, assisted by the aid of other players in the international community. It is worth noting that the Derg's rule did considerable damage to US-Ethiopian relations due to ideological differences, as well as the fact that the USA later attempted to shift their aid focus towards Somalia.

This leads to the notable involvement of the Soviet Union and, to some extent, Cuba, whose military as well as economic aid was pertinent for Ethiopia's stability, considering domestic economic issues. However, not all nations with ideological similarities supported Ethiopia as a result of other rivalries also playing a role, such as the Sino-Soviet rivalry that led to China supporting Somalia instead of Ethiopia. Therefore, it can be argued that Derg-ruled Ethiopia's international alliances were largely based on ideological similarities in an effort to showcase a consolidated force in the Cold War era as well as to facilitate the Derg's implementation of its ideology, although this was not necessarily an approach that other communist nations sought.

Furthermore, the case of the Ogaden War also serves as an important case in terms of examining the approach of international organisations towards the conflict that had resulted in significant casualties, as well as their perspective towards Ethiopia as an authoritarian nation engaging in several human rights violations. The OAU/AU, a prime organisation associated with this issue, initially did very little to stop Somali aggression into Ogaden and eventually supported Ethiopia in receiving foreign aid to fund its battle despite the organisation's supposed goal to reduce foreign interference in Africa. This also showcases the privilege that Ethiopia had and exploited as a founding member and as the nation with the headquarters of the organisation since, as a result, the OAU/AU turned a blind eye towards human rights issues in Ethiopia, which were being exacerbated by unstable economic growth, further fuelled by the Ogaden conflict.

Derg rule also played a major role in the independence of Eritrea, leading to Ethiopia becoming a landlocked country and forcing it to rely economically on Eritrean roads and the port of Djibouti for trade, which can be argued to have reduced Ethiopia's capabilities as well as their autonomy to trade without being overly dependent on its neighbours not just in the Derg era, but also in the modern day. Although Ethiopia did receive support from the Soviet Union and Cuba to suppress Eritrean independence protests, the constant conflict wore down the Ethiopian forces.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union had been evolving away from its previous communist ideology, weakening the Derg's support base regarding ideological similarity and leading to differences between the two nations, which paved the way for the end of the military aid agreement between them.

This dwindling international support and the exhaustion of its military might, particularly due to the major Ogaden War, showcased the weaknesses of the Derg government, which were exacerbated by public discontent towards the Derg's rule. This was furthered by the nationalisation of major industries, driving away foreign investment, and the famine of 1983-1985, which witnessed a lack of medical attention, brutal living conditions, and familial separation. One could argue, based on the information collected thus far, that the lack of initiative on Derg-ruled Ethiopia's part to join any new international organisations and their insistence on allying with nations sharing ideological similarities played a role in Ethiopia's economic downturn.

Overall, however, it becomes evident that Mengistu's 1990 speech served as a massive turning point for Ethiopia, wherein he essentially admitted to the Derg's failures, stating that the country was on the verge of collapse politically and economically. It can be understood that the Derg were stretched extremely thin throughout their reign; although Mengistu presented a sense of stability after a gruelling battle within the Derg for the seat of power, this was clearly not a guarantee for political or economic stability for the country, as can be observed from the study of the economic effects of Derg's rule and the instability that was created, leaving the country's civilians in a lurch. Furthermore, their government was considerably weakened after the loss of the Soviet Union as an ally, exposing the Derg's heavy reliance on the communist world power to affirm its own political and economic ideology as well as to obtain material support. It also revealed the extent to which Ethiopia was desperately operating on foreign aid, particularly since it also hardly had the USA to rely on. The country's resources were majorly exhausted in fighting Eritrean independence protesters and in fighting the Ogaden War, despite the large amounts of foreign aid received in the latter conflict. Based on later events, it becomes evident that the Ogaden victory came at a massive cost for Ethiopia, hence not benefiting the country in the long run.

Conclusion

In this research project, international engagements under the Derg's rule have been discussed at length by analysing the issues of the Ogaden War, the birth of Eritrea, the approach that international organisations took towards Ethiopia, and the economic effects of the Derg rule, examining domestic policies as well as aspects of international economics such as foreign investment, trade, and currency devaluation.

On the basis of the analysis done wherein two major events were used as case studies and Ethiopia's relationships with international organisations as well as the general impact of Derg rule from an economic perspective were explored, this project has delved into the complexities of Derg rule and the several major issues that plagued Ethiopia during this time on an international level, showcasing that the Derg did more harm than good for Ethiopia on three bases:

1. Politically: by subjecting the country to unstable leadership, heavy censorship, and human rights violations
2. Economically: as a result of poor economic planning and heavy reliance on foreign aid
3. Internationally: by failing to retain a major part of its territory, Ethiopia became landlocked, as well as gradually losing allyship with world powers.

To conclude, this research project finds that Ethiopia's international engagements during the Derg rule bore little to no fruit for the country in the long run, showcasing only some short-run benefits, such as momentary periods of positive economic growth and territorial retention through the Ogaden War. This study has demonstrated the challenges of running a Marxist-Leninist authoritarian government particularly after the reduction of ideological and material support from a major power, and the understandings obtained can be instrumental in comprehending the evolution of modern Ethiopia's international engagements. Overall, the Derg's reign can be characterised by gross human rights violations, continuous territorial conflict, an unstable government, economic downfall, lack of concrete allies, and thus a poor image internationally, bringing Ethiopia to the verge of collapse and creating massive instability in the Horn of Africa.

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Subtle Forms of Violence: The Psychosocial Impact of Microaggressions on Queer Students in Meghalaya

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Abstract

In contemporary times, violence has evolved beyond overt acts, manifesting in subtle forms such as verbal, behavioural, or environmental microaggressions, which wield profound impacts on victims. Particularly exacerbated in institutions lacking adequate regulation, these microaggressions have pervasive effects. This study investigates the psychosocial repercussions of microaggressions against queer students in local colleges in Meghalaya, India. Employing a mixed-methods approach with a convergent design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 queer students and an online survey with 100 participants. The findings expose the psychological distress, diminished sense of belonging, reduced academic productivity, and a looming threat of increased student dropouts among queer students. Urgent measures are recommended, including the promotion of inclusivity on university campuses through education on microaggressions, updating policies to delineate clear reporting and addressing procedures, and other strategic interventions.

Keywords: Higher Education, Microaggression, Psychosocial Wellness, Queer Communities

Internationally, research has demonstrated that individuals with intersectional identities often encounter multiple forms of discrimination, including microaggressions (Anzani et al., 2021; Nadal et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2018). Microaggressions are typically everyday, subtle, intentional or unintentional behaviours that convey biases against marginalised groups (Sue &

Spanierman, 2020; Williams, 2020). Unlike more overt forms of discrimination, microaggressions often occur with the perpetrators being unaware of their actions (Avant et al., 2020; Midgett & Mulvey, 2021). These microaggressions particularly affect queer individuals more than their non-queer peers, leading to negative consequences such as diminished self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other adverse mental health outcomes (Cook et al., 2019; Nadal, 2019). Research categorises microaggressions into three primary types: microinsults (which include verbal or behavioural insults and name-calling), micro-abuses (which involve prejudicial stereotypes through insensitive comments that make assumptions about a person's intelligence, morality, or group membership), and micro-devaluations (which are comments that undermine or deny the lived experiences of marginalised individuals) (Harrison & Tanner, 2018; Johnson & Johnson 2019; Sue et al., 2007; Ogunyemi et al., 2020). In this study, the term 'queer' is used to encompass any sexual and gender identities other than heterosexual and cisgender.

In India, as in other developing nations, the acceptance of queer individuals within educational institutions remains highly contentious in both policy and practice. A significant proportion of LGBTQ+ students in Indian schools endure various forms of bullying, including verbal and social bullying (Kumar, Gill & Verma, 2023; Turn the Bus, 2021). Despite India's advancements in queer rights, there remain substantial obstacles to achieving fully inclusive institutions (Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). Although there are protections in place for queer rights, individuals who do not conform to traditional gender identities and sexualities still face discrimination. The situation for queer communities in India is particularly precarious due to pervasive heteronormative cultures across all societal sectors, including education (Reygan, 2019). This is supported by Beagan et al. (2021), who contend that microaggressions contribute to hostile and unwelcoming environments for marginalised individuals, leading to psychological and emotional harm over time.

This study posits that microaggressions against queer students in Indian colleges impede the development of less discriminatory and more inclusive learning environments. Research has shown that universities must promote social justice and equity and assist stakeholders in recognising and addressing the needs of queer communities (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2019). Aiming to foster a more informed and empathetic campus culture by raising awareness within the broader university community about the experiences of their queer peers and the impact of discrimination, this study investigates the psychosocial effects of microaggressions on queer students at selected colleges in Meghalaya, India.

Methodology

Underpinned by a pragmatist paradigm, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach with a convergent design to explore the psychosocial consequences of microaggressions directed at queer students at selected colleges in Meghalaya. The pragmatist paradigm provided a

framework for combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a way that maximised their strengths and minimised their limitations (Creswell, 2019; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Quantitative Phase

Data was collected using an online survey designed to assess various aspects of the students' experiences in educational institutions. The survey instrument included sections on demographic information, experiences of bullying and discrimination, levels of social support, and mental health outcomes. To ensure validity and reliability, the survey incorporated well-established scales, such as:

- The LGBT Bullying and Harassment Scale (LGBTHS): This scale measures the frequency and severity of bullying and harassment experiences specific to LGBTQ+ individuals in educational settings (Poteat, 2009).
- The Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ6): This scale assesses perceived social support from friends, family, and the educational institution (Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987).
- The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12): This is a widely used measure for detecting psychiatric disorders and assessing mental health (Goldberg & Williams, 1988).

Qualitative Phase

- Personal experiences of acceptance or discrimination
- The impact of institutional policies on their educational experiences
- Suggestions for creating more inclusive educational environments

Interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms to ensure accessibility and comfort for participants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistical methods, including t-tests and chi-square tests, to identify significant differences and relationships between variables. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, which includes familiarisation with the data, coding, theme development, review, definition, and writing up.

Ethical Considerations

After obtaining ethical clearance from St. Anthony's College and St. Edmund's College (located in Laitumkhrah, Shillong, Meghalaya, 793003) and applying for gatekeeper approval, the researcher prioritised the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of the participants to ensure that the research did not harm the participants.

The consent form, drafted by the researcher in consultation with the ethics review boards of St. Anthony's College and St. Edmund's College, provided detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and participants' rights. Participants read and electronically signed the consent form before taking part in the survey or interviews. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, no identifying information was collected in the online survey, and pseudonyms were used for qualitative interview transcriptions and analyses. Data was securely stored on password-protected computers and encrypted storage devices, accessible only to the researcher. Interviews were conducted in private, comfortable settings chosen by the participants. Participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study revealed that there are many psycho-social consequences associated with experiences of microaggression towards queer communities. The most prominent aspects that were reported by the participants can be grouped into four broad categories namely psychological distress, loss of belonging, decreased productivity, and student dropouts. In the quantitative phase, the participants were asked to identify and rate the potential effects of microaggression from a list with an additional option of submitting additional responses that were listed in the survey. On the other hand, in the qualitative phase, participants were asked, "What are the effects of microaggressions faced by queer students at this university?" The following subsections will present and discuss the findings in greater detail.

Psychological Distress

Of the 98 students who answered the question on the extent to which microaggressions they faced led to psychological distress, 39.8% strongly agreed, 30.6% agreed, while another 13.3% disagreed, 10.2% strongly disagreed, and the remaining 6.1% said they did not know. The findings in Figure 1 below depict the extent to which participants rated psychological distress as being caused by microaggressions faced by queer students.

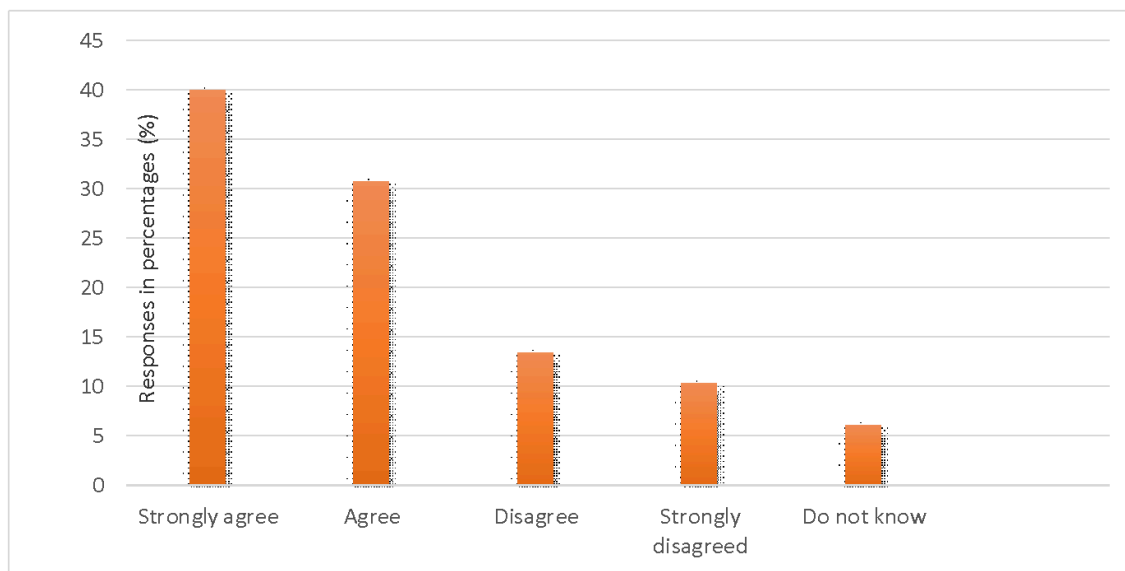


Figure 1: *Psychological Distress as an Outcome of Microaggressions*

The results indicate that a significant majority (70.4%) of participants agreed that microaggressions led to psychological distress, suggesting that such experiences are a substantial source of stress for queer students. This is further corroborated by the qualitative phase of the study, where students reported anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem as consequences of microaggressions.

For instance, Student D described the impact of subtle comments reinforcing harmful stereotypes, which led to increased anxiety and stress:

I have been subjected to many subtle comments that reinforce harmful stereotypes by fellow students. The terrible thing with these subtle comments is that they leave me questioning if I am being petty, or whether in actual fact I am seeing and hearing things that are not there...I have found myself more and more anxious in public spaces...we cannot seem to be able to report this anywhere because there is very little to speak about after all. It is very stressful to be in this position. (Student D)

Similarly, Student O highlighted the struggle with indirect mockery and the challenge of being in a male residence while transitioning:

I used to be a very bubbly student; I had a very interactive personality before coming to this university. My high school and family are very accepting, and I never knew that someone could make you feel some way without necessarily having to say something...I have heard people laugh at me indirectly and it messes with me very much. I love dresses and makeup, but I really

struggle because of the subtle comments the queer community gets. It doesn't help that I am in a male residence, and it is just a mess for me as someone transitioning. (Student O)

Student G also expressed feeling objectified and alienated due to microaggressions:

This thing [microaggressions] is very prevalent here. Students and lecturers at this university are not very inclusive. I always feel objectified when people around me suggest that my identity is just a phase and make jokes about my sexuality. It is hard to be taken for granted and have slurs used in a way that disregards you. I constantly feel lost and alienated here. (Student G)

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases reveal that queer students at the university experience significant psychological distress due to microaggressions. These results align with other studies that show microaggressions often lead to severe mental health issues, such as anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem (Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Midgette & Mulvey, 2021). Seelman et al. (2017) found a positive association between microaggressions and psychological distress, while Scharer and Taylor (2018) reported that exposure to microaggressions results in mental health problems, leading some victims to cope through substance abuse.

To mitigate these effects, it is crucial for universities to educate their communities about microaggressions and their impact on mental health. Training for lecturers, administrators, and students on recognizing and responding to microaggressions is essential (Morris et al., 2020).

Loss of Sense of Belonging

Of the 97 responses received for the question on the extent to which microaggressions they faced led to the loss of a sense of belonging, 36.1% strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, while another 10.3% disagreed, 3.1% strongly disagreed, and the remaining 8.2% said they did not know. Figure 2 below illustrates the extent to which participants rated their loss of sense of belonging as being caused by microaggressions faced by queer students.

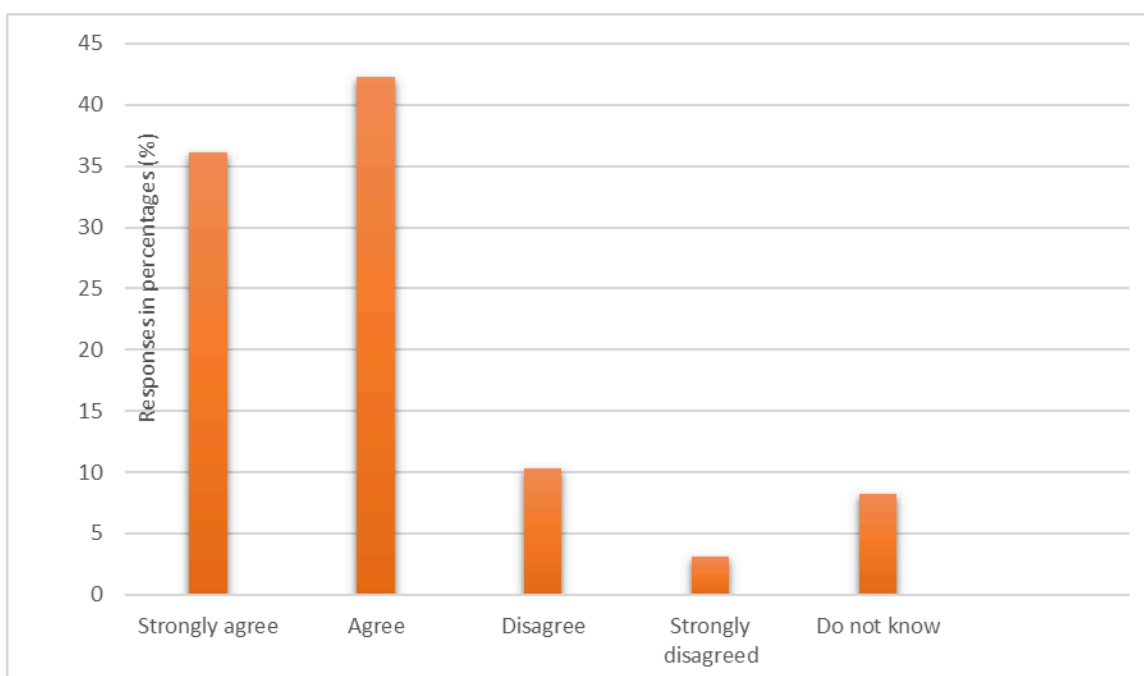


Figure 2: *Loss of Sense of Belonging as an Outcome of Microaggressions*

The findings above reveal that queer students generally affirmed that they grapple with a loss of sense of belonging due to the microaggressions they were exposed to. This was represented by a cumulative 78.4% that affirmed this (36.1% strongly agreeing and 42.3% agreeing) as opposed to a meagre 21.6% that either disagreed, strongly disagreed, or did not know. This suggests that loss of sense of belonging was a prominent outcome of macroaggressions faced by queer students. These sentiments were corroborated in the qualitative phase where participants revealed that microaggressions had created an unreceptive environment for queer students, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection from the university community. Participants revealed that this affected their sense of belonging and overall satisfaction with their university experience. One can consider the example of a student who contended,

I do not belong here...everywhere I go I feel like I am an outsider. You walk into a room and people giggle; you get glances and stares that are uncomfortable, and the room always feels like it is becoming smaller and smaller. I have just two friends...nothing more, that is my life here... (Student B)

This was similar to the sentiments of another student who posited,

I have a hard time working with other students when we do group work. I feel like there is nobody that wants to work with me as if I am some monster. It is really hard for me as a gay

man...I have been kicked out of groups and failed modules because some people just do not like me. The lecturers too are of no help, they do not even give you audience. (Student H)

More damning perspectives were offered by a student who reasoned,

Because of microaggressions, I have seen that generally queer persons tend to interact in isolation from others...people outside of our queer communities are less accepting and generally mean. I think microaggressions are worse than physical violence because, unlike physical violence, this is internal and sometimes people end up depressed and sometimes even commit suicide. I know someone who did it [committed suicide] because of such subtle violence which cannot be reported because of lack of tangible evidence. (Student M)

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study revealed that exposure to microaggressions was resulting in the loss of a sense of belonging among queer students. The findings revealed that queer students' exposure to microaggressions created a sense of invalidation and exclusion which ultimately led to a lack of sense of belonging. These findings corroborate the results of previous studies that demonstrate that microaggressions create a sense of otherness and isolation which ultimately makes the persons exposed to them feel like they neither fit in nor are valued in the academic community (Beagan et al., 2021). This is also in line with studies that reveal that microaggressions make victims feel like they need to defend their identity or explain their identity which ultimately leads to disconnection and alienation from the community (Lomash et al., 2019; Avant et al., 2020). In other cases, microaggressions are said to create a sense of imposter syndrome, where individuals feel like they don't belong because they are not "enough" of a particular identity (Byers et al., 2020; Woodford et al., 2021). This is particularly challenging for individuals who hold multiple marginalised identities or who do not conform to societal norms (Thacker et al., 2022). It thus becomes imperative for educational institutions to work towards eradicating behaviours and conduct that alienates and excludes minorities.

Decreased Academic Productivity

Of the 95 responses to the question on whether the microaggressions they were exposed to led to decreased academic output, 31.6% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, while another 10.5% disagreed, 14.7% strongly disagreed and the remaining 3.2% said they did not know. Figure 3 below illustrates the extent to which participants rated their decreased academic output as being caused by microaggressions they were exposed to as queer students.

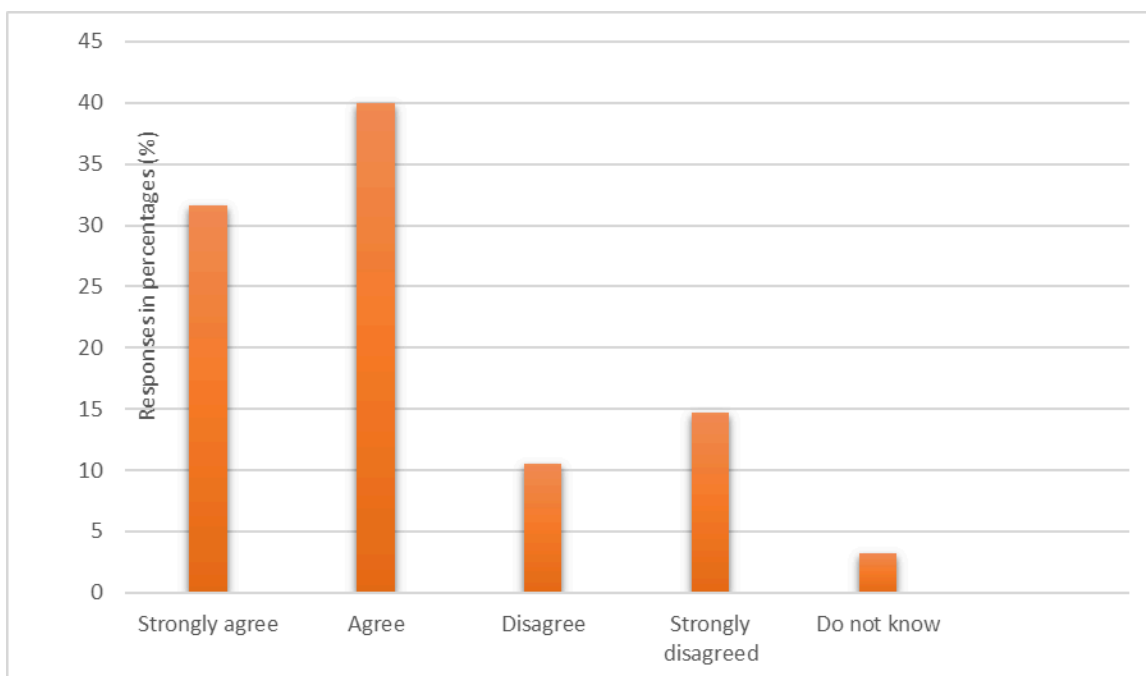


Figure 3: *Decreased Academic Output as an Outcome of Microaggressions*

The findings above reveal that queer students generally acknowledged that they faced decreased academic output because of the microaggressions they were exposed to. This was represented by a collective 71.6% that affirmed this (31.6% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing) as opposed to a paltry 28.4% that either disagreed, strongly disagreed, or did not know. Similar findings also emerged from the qualitative phase of the study in which participants revealed that their exposure to microaggressions made it difficult to concentrate in classes, lowered their motivation to attend classes, and made it more difficult to complete collaborative assignments. To this end, one can consider the sentiments of a student who argued,

When I came out as bisexual in my second year, I really struggled with microaggressions. My performance academically nosedived and I was suddenly struggling to get [...] minimum passes. Looking back, it was because I was suffering from several subtle and unreportable violent tendencies from classmates and other students in general. I switched from being outgoing to suddenly staying in my room for the greater part of the day...I only managed to rescue my academic life when I joined queer student groups on Facebook... (Student A)

A more pointed response was offered by a student who reasoned,

I have been bullied into not participating in groups that we sometimes do our work in because of derogatory slurs that are homophobic. I have a gay friend who ended up repeating a full year because of conflicts with group mates who kept using the term gay to refer to anything undesirable and things like that. I can say that my academic performance has been affected

because as a crossdresser, I get uncomfortable remarks that sound like they are questioning my sexuality and dismissing my identity...microaggressions from peers or instructors are really triggering and bring up past experiences of discrimination. This makes it hard for me to focus on academic work and contributes to my anxiety or depression academically. (Student E)

Another example can be drawn from a student who lamented,

When lecturers make assumptions [heteronormative] in their lectures and course materials, it feels like an erasure of my experiences and perspectives. It is very demoralising and makes me feel detached from the entire learning process. I have a constant feeling that although the university preaches inclusivity, I just do not belong – this is very clear from the microaggressions I face multiple times daily. The time and energy I use to defend my identity and educate my lecturers and peers leave me drained and disheartened. (Student L)

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study revealed that the participants viewed exposure to microaggressions as resulting in decreased academic performance. The participants believed that it was more difficult to focus on their studies, attend class, and complete assignments as a result of the microaggressions they had been exposed to. These findings find expression in studies that reveal that victims of microaggressions grapple with a sense of psychological distress which interferes with an individual's ability to focus on academic work (Midgett & Mulvey, 2021; Debiase et al., 2022; Fitzgerald-Russell & Kowalske, 2022). Similar assertions are made in studies that argue that like other forms of maltreatment, microaggressions can increase stress levels and depression and lead to a negative impact on academic performance (Lett et al., 2020; Miles et al., 2020). This disrupts the affected students' ability to engage in the learning process because their feelings of belonging are constantly questioned (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Avant et al., 2020; Beagan et al., 2021). In cases where microaggressions create hostile learning environments, students often doubt their ability and become less expressive as they feel othered (Reygan, 2019; Williams, 2020). It thus becomes imperative for microaggressions to be addressed to ensure student success and access in educational institutions.

Student Dropout

Of the 95 responses to the question on whether microaggressions towards queer persons could result in their dropping out, 25.3% strongly agreed, 28.6% agreed, another 25.3% disagreed, 15.4% strongly disagreed and the remaining 5.5% said they did not know. Figure 4 below shows the extent to which participants believed that microaggressions could result in their dropping out of their respective studies.

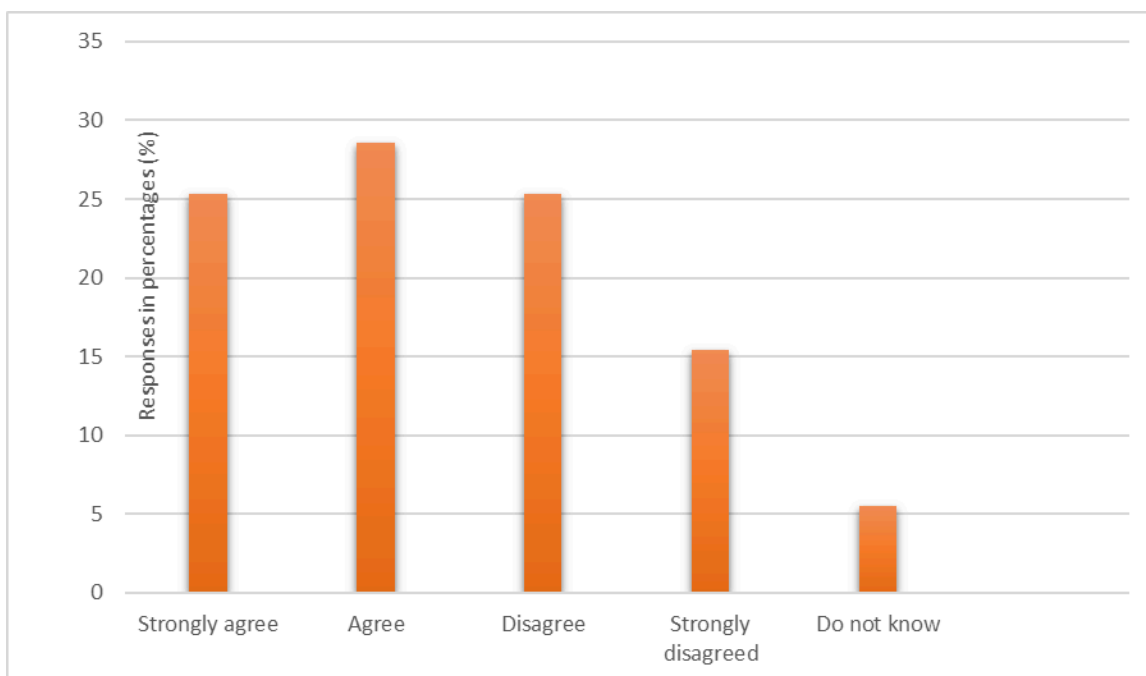


Figure 4: *Dropping Out as an Outcome of Microaggressions*

The findings above reveal that queer students generally accepted that if left unaddressed, the microaggressions they were exposed to could result in their dropping out. A slight cumulative total of 53.9% affirmed the possibility of dropping out of their studies by agreeing and agreeing, while a close 46.1% either disagreed, strongly disagreed, or did not know. These results are concerning because they represent the possibility of students failing to complete their studies because of microaggressive behaviours suffered at the hands of their peers. Similar concerns were also voiced by the participants in the qualitative phase who demonstrated that due to the chronic isolation and mental distress caused by microaggressions, they had at some point actively entertained the possibility of dropping out. A case in point can be drawn from a student who said,

As I speak to you, I am actively exploring whether it is necessary for me to continue studying. I sometimes like it is just not worth it – the mental torment that I have suffered is just too much. I do not want to continue with this if I am going to end up contemplating suicide...this is just uncomfortable for me. I want the degree, but I also need peace of mind. (Student I)

This was also substantiated by the perspective offered by a student who posited,

I know three of my gay friends who dropped out because of microaggressions. I have also seen unfortunately some contemplate suicide...unfortunately one person I know committed suicide. Microaggressions make you feel isolated and insignificant, and for a very long time we [queer persons] did not like going to the counselling unit because even there, we were being treated

unfairly. We spoke about these things in our WhatsApp groups. Before I found queer friends to help me cope, I wanted to just leave this place. (Student K)

Speaking from their personal experience and the experiences of those around them, another student opined,

Personally, I have never thought about dropping out because if I do, it makes the abusers feel powerful. Nowadays, I have learnt to speak back, spite back, and be very vocal about this type of violence...In our support groups, however, we always have people contemplating leaving the institution before completing their studies. It is a very legitimate response to the problems surrounding the life of queer persons here. We are made to feel like adopted kids staying with an evil stepmother... (Student F)

The findings from the two phases of the study seem to suggest that if left unchallenged, microaggressions towards queer students could result in their dropping out. Participants noted that because queer persons were constantly made to feel inferior to their peers, they sometimes contemplated or knew someone who contemplated dropping out. This resonates with Johnston-Goodstar and VeLure Roholt (2017) whose study revealed that microaggressions play a role in school climate and the rate at which minorities are pushed out by gruelling experiences of being othered. In some instances, minorities battling microaggressions have been known to drop out because of the loss of funding due to lapses in academic performance (Warner, 2019; Ogunyemi, et al., 2020). Studies reveal that the relationship between experiences of microaggressions and queer students' intentions to transfer from the institution is explained by discomfort in the learning contexts (Crane, et al., 2022; Veldhuis, 2022). Queer students who encounter microaggressions more frequently report feeling more uneasy in their classes and are less interested in continuing their education at their institution (Miles et al., 2020; Crane et al., 2022). One can therefore note that there is a need to acknowledge and address the negative effects of microaggressions in a manner that ensures higher completion rates for queer communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the psychosocial impacts of microaggressions on queer students through a mixed methods approach. Although the research was confined to two colleges and therefore does not permit broad generalisations, it revealed that queer students continue to encounter discriminatory behaviours in the form of microaggressions. Participants in the study reported significant psychosocial outcomes, including psychological distress, diminished sense of belonging, reduced academic productivity, and even dropping out.

In light of these findings, the study underscores the urgent need for Indian colleges and universities to address the prevalence of microaggressions on their campuses. It is crucial to educate both students and staff about microaggressions, initiating the process of identification and eradication through workshops and seminars led by trained professionals. Furthermore, institutional policies should be revised to include explicit procedures for reporting and addressing microaggressions, recognising that such issues cannot be effectively managed by generalised policies on violence and student conduct.

There is a critical need for Indian colleges and universities to embrace inclusivity and develop strategies and interventions that foster more welcoming environments, free from discrimination against minorities. These policies should be continuously evaluated for their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the campus community. Finally, to promote student success and equitable access to education, it is essential to cultivate inclusive campuses that welcome all students. Diversity and inclusion initiatives will be vital in achieving this goal.

Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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The Unfortunate Alliance of Partisan Politics and Resentful Relationships

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Abstract

Discourse on the polarisation in Indian politics has been increasing over the years, fuelled by the digital age. However, the subsequent effect of this polarisation upon relationships remains largely unexplored. There is a lack of research upon the impact of divisive political views upon relationships, and family dynamics in particular. This paper bridges that gap by studying the effect of such factors in the Indian setting, lending support to the fact that Confirmation Bias, Media Exposure, Sensationalization and Fake News create and concretise polarising views; and in turn examines the impact of such views on familial relationships. The knowledge gained from this investigation advances our understanding of the social ramifications of media-driven political divisiveness in India. The results point to a significant relationship between the rise of divisive political viewpoints and media saturation, particularly in the digital sphere. Furthermore, the paper critically analyses individuals' perception of opposing political views within the family and inter-generational differences regarding the same.

Keywords: media exposure, polarised politics, familial relationships, confirmation bias, echo chambers, inter-generational differences, Indian subcontinent

The inflammatory relationship between media and politics is fundamental and intrinsic to human culture, forming one of the most essential and longstanding associations. One furthers the other, intertwining them together as co-conspirators in the market of life.

Today, we see this coalition grow and strengthen in nature more than ever before, with wide-ranging effects. Advertisers and organisations alike have weaponized media as a medium to further their agenda. Political media propaganda is ever-evolving and inescapable; therefore, it is bound to have a lasting impact on our lives. It is this very phenomenon that the researcher wishes to cover, as the differentiating factor between previous political propaganda and the current is the sheer unforeseen volume and intensity.

As of 2023, India has 833 million active Internet users, 400 million newspapers in circulation (even post-pandemic), 392 news channels (operating predominantly on ‘Breaking News’ models) (BBC, 2023). 73% of the population access news conveniently and on-the-go through their smartphones (Reuters, 2021). With such a degree of connectivity and immediate access to a variety of news and corresponding opinions, one can conclude that there is significant media exposure present in India today. In addition to these traditional news sources, active social media penetration is 33.4% (Forbes, 2023), adding to the same. It is worth exploring whether there is a correlation between this media prevalence and strikingly varied political views present in the country today.

The intense polarisation has been described as likely to have “catastrophic” effects on India. Interestingly, Kar (2022) has a unique take on the polarised political climate today, calling it the result of seeds sown in the previous decade as well as the tactics of the current government, highlighting the compound effect produced. He also states that because of growing group grievances and more polarised elites, social cohesiveness and fragility have increased in severity. In line with this, it can be said that while the origin of a divide may be traced back to a few decades ago, it has gathered unprecedented steam and momentum in recent years and has resulted in glaring political battle lines.

Families in India are facing the brunt of this deadly discord. Moulding young children’s minds is very simple, and in their fundamental growing stage, their families are their go-to for answers to all questions. This is even more so in India, where close-knit communities, collectivistic culture and deeply emotional family dynamics centred in longevity of relationships are predominant. We often see numerous discussions about dynasty dependency or vote-bank politics that occur over decadent gulab jamun or a cup of chai. Indians adore ‘talking politics’ – it is not uncommon to see uproar over political alliances break up a perfectly good dinner-party, or get an inside view of bonding over the latest political scandal. But while the political conversations may be robust, we now commonly see a shift in the nature of these discussions as they take on a darker undertone – something that may spell trouble. There is no denying the diametrically opposite views that exist within the country today, nor the arguments that arise due to the same. However, it is the need of the hour to see whether such opposing views are creating an impact upon familial relationships, and to what extent this impact may be.

The author's interest lies in this area as it is a relatively unexplored field and one that will have important implications upon society and social perception in the coming years. The development of extremist political views and debates arising over the same amongst loved ones, is a widespread occurrence with long-lasting and harmful implications that is not being spoken about enough. To that extent, the present study delves into pre-existing bodies of research to better understand the contributing factors of polarisation and its subsequent impact.

Media Exposure and the subsequent rise of Polarisation

Prasetya and Murata's study utilises a model of opinion dynamics and studies the role of media exposure in propagating extremist views (Prasetya & Murata, 2020). Qureshi et al., (2022) references the role of narratives and sensationalism as persuasion strategies in the U.S.A. Investigating social media specifically may prove to be the key factor for the increase in polarised opinions in recent times (Lott, 2014). Qureshi et al., (2022) references the role of narratives and sensationalism as persuasion strategies in the U.S.A. Investigating social media specifically may prove to be the key factor for the increase in polarised opinions in recent times. (Lott, 2014)

Echo Chambers and Confirmation Bias

When we speak of echo chambers and confirmation bias as players in the political landscape, Pariser introduces the concept of a 'filter bubble', described as a "unique universe of information for each of us". It combines the idea of social media users as a commodity, bid upon by buyers wishing to influence their choices and views. (Pariser, 2011) This, subsequently known as an echo chamber, has been found to strengthen polarised views as it furthers negative sentiments such as targeted anger and hatred. (Halversen, 2021; Cardenal et al., 2019) The concept of 'selective exposure' reiterates the message of repetitive beliefs, cementing the role of Confirmation Bias. (Stroud, 2008)

Effect on Relationships

Iyengar (2019) highlights the increasing prevalence of strong opposing political opinions and hatred amongst Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.A, termed as affective polarisation. Similarly, Warner, et al., (2021) explores the effect of differing political opinions upon familial relationships.

Building upon the existing body of research, this study aims to solve the issue of pre-existing U.S-centric research by choosing a target audience within the Indian subcontinent.

The research question being explored is: Does constant media exposure contribute to the formation of polarised political views that impact familial relationships in India? The objectives of the study are:

1. To study the role of Confirmation Bias in solidifying certain views through the factors of Exposure, social media Echo Chambers and Immediate Validation
2. To study the role played by Sensationalization of news and political matters, Artificial Intelligence and Fake News in the development and concretisation of views
3. To subsequently understand the impact of the divergent and opposing views formed upon individuals' familial relationships
4. To investigate whether there are any inter-generational differences with respect to the impact of these views

Methodology

In this research, a combination of primary and secondary sources was employed. First, the Case Study method was used to explore two case studies in order to understand whether polarised political views are being formed, along with the extent to which they may be. Secondly, considering the numerous psychological and societal aspects, a Field Survey was conducted in order to gain practical and firsthand knowledge.

Case Study

Objectives 1 and 2 were studied with the help of two case studies of two major political events that have occurred in India in the recent past were done; The Abrogation of Article 370, 2019 and the India-China Galwan border clash, 2020

Additionally to address objectives 3 and 4, a field survey was conducted. The researcher measured the role of constant media exposure in the development of extreme views and whether they may lead to interpersonal issues on a case-to-case basis, allowing room for subjectivity. The survey consisted of 21 multiple choice questions with comprehensive answers to choose from. The survey tool comprised two sections wherein the first section collected data about their general policy regarding political discussions, while the second section collected data with respect to their personal perception of politics and familial relationships.

Study Population:

Indian citizens (male, female) aged 18-70 years.

Case Study Analysis

RO 1: To study the role of Confirmation Bias in solidifying certain views through the factors of exposure, social media Echo Chambers and Immediate Validation

Case Study 1 aims to examine Research Objective 1.

Confirmation Bias is a psychological term which states that people tend to process and store information that is in agreement with their pre-existing beliefs. Constant exposure to media sources plays a vital role in propagating this bias, creating an impact by the volume of content available for consumption.

This gives rise to social media Echo Chambers, where interaction with a particular type of content ensures repeated exposure to the same and cements the pre-existing views. One of the key tools of media utilised in political spheres for propaganda is social media. It is built in such a manner that the algorithm shapes itself as per a person's interactions. The more a person interacts with a particular type of content, the more they will see that content across their feed. This feeds into their beliefs and reiterates the same message to them. Additionally, they are likely to follow those people who subscribe to similar opinions. They repeat the same through their platforms and thus the consumer is stuck in an eternal echo chamber, all the while feeling that they are expanding their horizons and learning more and more reasons why their ideas are correct. Since a major part of socialisation has become through social media, many people continue to derive all their opinions from there due to lack of interactions with people with opposing opinions. Again, confirmation bias plays a role.

A supplementary factor is that of Immediate Validation or Gratification provided through social media. A key feature of social media is its instantaneous nature. People are able to obtain replies and reactions within seconds of posting. They begin to view it as – if 'x' people are agreeing with me, there must be some sense in what I am saying, therefore, I am right and my opinion is superior.

When we receive immediate validation through social media in the form of likes and comments, our brain releases dopamine, creating an artificial and short-lived feeling of satisfaction that we begin to crave. People fall into a trap of instant validation and begin to crave the same. Here the rising levels of loneliness, anonymity and increased usage of social media as an easy escape to cope with life's problems plays a role. Most importantly, people feel heard. Thus, many individuals turn to social media to gain that validation that they are missing in real life. Everyone does not put out their own content – many simply react and comment, as comments can also be liked and replied to – a form of validation.

Case Study 1: Abrogation of Article 370, 2019

“A historic decision”, “Exercise restraint”, “Unconstitutional”, “Adopt peaceful methods and dialogue” – the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir on 5th August 2019 led to mass furore and divided opinions, in the way that most matters regarding Kashmir do. (Chaure, 2021)

Article 370 was incorporated at the time of independence and accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir, allowing it to have its own Constitution, flag and rules. Additionally, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was given the authority to choose who its permanent inhabitants were when Article 35A was enacted. This legislation forbade non-permanent residents from acquiring land in Kashmir and settling there, along with other special provisions and a special status. The Modi-led BJP government abrogated Article 370 in 2019, declaring Jammu and Kashmir as two union territories (J&K and Ladakh) instead of a single state. This also meant that its unique status under Article 35A was revoked, leading to many reforms, such as the removal of property sale limitations and the distinct flag and Constitution, and modifications to the legislation pertaining to residence and marital status.

The news was broken to the citizens of India overnight. Two broad opposing viewpoints came to light in this instance – one that was staunchly opposed to the abrogation, declaring it a tyrannical power move that stripped Kashmir’s autonomy; while the other celebrated the move as long overdue and a much-needed step further towards the country’s complete unity. The two camps began to share and propagate their views on all platforms available.

Now what is interesting about this is that the divide was evident across social media platforms. The presence of a neutral tone hashtag (#Article370) was there only for one hour. 112 hashtags were spawned between 1st August 2019 to 30th November, 2019, with 65 hashtags having a pro-abrogation tone and around 40 hashtags conveying dissent with the abrogation. These 112 hashtags in total discussed issues such as Pakistan’s involvement in J&K and J&K at the UNGA. It has been reported that 87,000 users tweeted 1,87,000+ tweets utilising one out of the 12 pro-abrogation hashtags – however, this does not mean 1,87,00 individuals posted these. Multiple tweets were posted by certain users, i.e. there was not an equitable divide in the number of tweets per user either. It was found that 25% (46,800) of these tweets could be accounted to just 3,134 users, which is 15 tweets per user. (Jaffrelot & Jumle, 2023) This significant group of people are responsible for propagating a particular viewpoint. It also helped that this large number of people all put out similar/same messaging.

The effect of this can be seen through the fact that 2,36,000 users retweeted these messages. The impact group (3,134) accumulated 35.9% of all likes and 41.7% of all replies on this topic. (Jaffrelot & Jumle, 2023) The meaning of these likes and retweets is straightforward – people began to resonate with these viewpoints. The impact group were able to see the effect of their thoughts upon thousands of strangers and this inflated their self-worth while validating their

personal beliefs. This in turn emboldened them to put out more tweets in the same vein, and this is where the multiple tweets per user mentioned previously comes into play. The immediate gratification is a natural response to such adulation and support, and this can be seen through the fact that the same users kept tweeting about the issue once they realised that people saw sense and worth what they had expressed. The constant exposure aspect is blindingly apparent through the multitude of tweets (in this instance) that were generated to discuss the abrogation of Article 370. When there is such an overwhelming coverage of a subject, it comes to the forefront of the issues being discussed at that particular time and occupies centre-stage in people's minds.

Now, speaking about the other interlinked instance that comes to prominence in this case – Confirmation Bias. Since the impact group's tweets gained popularity through increased interaction, they began to appear on more users' feeds. Once the users began to interact with such content, they began to see more of it – and so the cycle continued. This is how echo chambers were successfully created. The toxic echo chambers (defined by Pilditch and Madsen as “enclosed epistemic circles where like-minded people communicate and reinforce pre-existing beliefs”) created through immediate gratification and capitalistic social media algorithms worked together to solidify the effect of Confirmation Bias on ordinary users, and thus dictated opinion formation.

Case Study 2 aims to explore Research Objective 2 – the role of news outlets in fanning debates and hatred. Factors such as Fake News (a term we are now well-acquainted with, fake news is dangerous for relationships as it results in confident wrong opinions) also play a significant role in fear-mongering and vilification. The fake news epidemic is severe, with long-lasting repercussions. Not only do people form strong opinions from it, they are unwilling to budge from them even when presented with contrasting and correct information (due to Confirmation Bias and the believability of fake news), arguing that the new information is the one that is fake instead. The blind faith it creates becomes almost impossible to argue against. Fake news has no particular form – while it is true that the older generation is more likely to succumb to believing more obvious forms of fake news, it does not mean that the younger generation is able to escape it. It may be harder to fool the younger generation as they have more knowledge and awareness of the functioning of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the prevalence of untruths, but they still succumb to it. They are more likely to get influenced by viral social media posts on ‘trendier’ platforms such as Instagram and Twitter.

Sensationalism is a term that has been part of debates surrounding news distribution since time immemorial. While the phenomenon has existed for decades, discussions regarding sensational news reporting are more common now because consumers are more aware, and because its prevalence has greatly increased.

India-China Galwan border clash

In 2020, tensions rose between India and China over the issue of the shared Galwan border. This culminated in a confrontation that occurred on 15th June, 2020, near Patrol Point 14 in the Galwan Valley of eastern Ladakh between the Indian Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army forces. (Lee, n.d.) When an Indian patrol encountered Chinese soldiers on a small hilltop, fighting started out and an Indian commanding officer was shoved during the altercation and fell into the river valley. Both sides summoned hundreds of soldiers, who engaged in combat. (Davidson & Doherty, 2020) This resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers.

There was a huge media uproar over the situation since it was the first fatal clash after many years. In the volume of media reporting, there were a lot of factual inaccuracies and a great deal of discussion regarding the issue of fake news.

When we have progressed into an era where physical warfare is considered the last resort, countries have developed their own new ways of nationalistic chest-thumping and macho displays of their power. One such method is through the advent of the weaponisation of social media, utilising modern-day warfare consisting of online disinformation and propaganda. The use of such means is to create a wedge between the public on political grounds just as much as it is to create the global narrative. Currently, deepfakes have the ability to sow doubts in people's minds, diminish and destroy trust, lend support to pre-existing biases, and cleverly manipulate people's opinions.

In this situation, Twitter became the foreground for the discussion of these issues with many fake handles pretending to be Chinese nationals and spreading false information against India. A fake account called 'Cathy Rolanova' (@CRolanova) shared an old image showing an injured soldier being carried by the Indian army. This was actually from 3 months before the altercation (The Quint, 2020).

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Image 1: Cathy Rolanova's tweet

The same account also stated that China had occupied the Pangong Tso Lake and that the Indian government was concealing this information from the public, leading to outcry and accusations of hiding their failures. The image turned out to be an Indo-Tibetan Border Police Camp, but it had served its purpose and stoked a fire amongst citizens. (The Quint, 2020)



Image 2: The misleading map shared

In many such situations, the misinformation schemes followed by the Chinese also gained support from Pakistani Twitter trolls, who utilised this opportunity to amplify and spread propaganda against India within their own networks. (Gauri & Patil, 2023)

There was plenty of fake news from the other side of the debate as well. A video went viral on YouTube, allegedly showing ‘real’ footage of the clash at Galwan where the Indian army is shown to be defeating and ‘kicking out’ the Chinese army. The video was false as it took place during the day, and the clash at night, but it was enough to rouse hyper-nationalistic instincts of false pride within the country.



Image 3: The old video in question

A video showing a funeral for a martyred Indian soldier also did the rounds on social media (40,000+ views), gathering furious and heartbroken responses from enraged Indians; however, it was found that the soldier had died previously in an accident in Leh-Ladakh in May. (BBC, 2020) Since there was no accountability and this was taken as the truth, there was the rise of incendiary feelings amongst people.

Another picture that went viral online was a room full of coffins of what was believed to be the Indian soldiers martyred in the Galwan clash. However, it was soon found that the picture was from 2019 and likely associated with the Pulwama attacks. While this was not confirmed, the time when the picture was taken was definitely prior to 2020. Therefore, we can see yet again how false images were being used to fan nationalistic rhetoric amongst Indians within India. (The Quint, 2020)



Images 4&5: The tweet intended to spread misinformation (L) and the original tweet (R)

Even within the country, these fake videos and posts had a divisive impact. Some felt that they were being circulated widely to present an overly-emphasised image of India's military strength and government support to the military, while others felt that the videos were based in truth and were doing the crucial job of highlighting our armed forces' efforts. Here we can see the seeds of disruption being planted.

The news media also employed sensationalist rhetoric by using those headlines and capturing over-dramatised statements meant to generate sentimental responses. An example of this is PM Modi's statement, "We have the capability that no one can cast an eye on an inch of our territory" – this was widely captured across media outlets. This was followed by statements regarding development in military equipment and handling and also reiterated by Amit Shah's exclamation "I want to say it clearly... till the time the BJP government led by Prime Minister Modi is in power, no one can capture an inch of our land" and "*Iske liye jaan de denge*" while referring to Aksai Chin. (Yadav, 2020) Many felt that it was rousing nationalistic statements in order to serve

personal causes and was opportunistic, attempting to highlight the improvement in border military capacity under a certain government. (Gupta, 2020)

The two parties' opposing rhetoric began.



PM has surrendered Indian territory to Chinese aggression.

If the land was Chinese:

1. Why were our soldiers killed?
2. Where were they killed?



Press Trust of India ✓
@PTI_News



Neither anyone has intruded into our territory nor took over any post: PM Narendra Modi at all-party meeting on Ladakh face-off

8:51 PM · Jun 19, 2020 · [PTI_Tweets](#)



Image 6: Tweets by political leaders

The government was accused of fanning sentiments against China (#boycottChina was trending) without providing clear and precise information regarding the occurrences. This was opposed by others who felt that the military was finally receiving the respect they deserved from ordinary citizens. And so, the debate raged on and on, and Indians argued amongst themselves over an issue where they should have stood united as a country – such is the impact of sensationalism.

In order to examine Research Objectives 3 and 4, the researcher analysed the results of the data gathered through the survey that was conducted. The survey was sent to over 300 individuals, and received 100 valid responses. Of this, 36 respondents identified as Male, 63 as Female, and 1 as Other. Since there was a skewed gender distribution, gender-based variances were not examined while drawing conclusions as it would not adequately represent the gender's feelings and behaviour patterns.

The third question grouped respondents as per their age. Respondents fell into one of four categories: 18-27 years, 28-43 years, 44-59 years and 60+ years (Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Boomers). Within these, Baby Boomers had only 4 responses, therefore, they will not be considered as adequate representatives of their particular age range, considering there are too few respondents to generalise responses.

While attempting to gauge the level of interest and active participation in political matters amongst the respondents, it was discovered that 66% of people planned to vote in the upcoming

2024 Lok Sabha elections, and that 90% of the respondents discussed politics with their family Regularly or Sometimes (47% and 43% respectively). This lay the ground for the study, illustrating that politics is a vital part of human life and interactions in India today, making their way into conversations with family on a routine basis.

In response to the question, '*Do you think your family's political views differ from yours?*', 75% of respondents voted Yes and Maybe, establishing that there exists a variance in political views, and that views are not as easily and clearly aligned as they may have been in the past. There exists a gap in familial views that perhaps was not as prevalent before. Earlier, it was widely accepted that the family can exert a considerable influence upon the children's political views, and that children often adopt these views without much questioning or discussion. (Karakoç, 2000) It was believed to be the primary moulder of the child's political beliefs and ideas. (Turan & Tıraş, 2017) However, as per the responses, it appears that this may no longer be accurate. What must be noted here is that the respondents belong to an upper-middle class background wherein they have adequate access to education and resources to educate themselves on political topics, which also allows them the freedom to debate the same within their households.

When probed further on these differences and whether respondents believed they had an impact upon their relationships with family, 64% emphatically answered in the negative. Gen X in particular had only 4 respondents choosing 'Maybe'. 42% of Gen Z voted for Yes and Maybe, as opposed to only 17% of Gen X. Here the question arises whether both generations are viewing the matter in the same manner, or whether there is a lack of transparency and realisation about the impact of views amongst different members.

Therefore, at this stage, it appeared that people seemed to feel that the varying political views had no impact upon their familial relations, at first glance. It was evident that this belief needed to be investigated to see whether it would still hold when tested further, since respondents may not consider all the nuances while answering just this question as a blanket statement. Thus, the next questions first gathered more data to gauge their reactions in different instances.

In order to further define and gauge how varied political views affected familial ties for those who chose 'Yes' and 'Maybe', the impact was categorised into 3 options: Healthy Debate, A situation where you Agree to Disagree, and Arguments. 32% of individuals replied that the differences in views did not affect relationships in any manner, showing that the majority of people *did* face some issues. Gen Z seemed to have the most difficulty when it came to difference in views, with only 27% of them not feeling any kind of impact. They had the largest responses for 'Arguments' and 'Agree to Disagree'.

However, the Gen X group that would generally comprise some of their parents, did not share this view, with many respondents selecting 'Healthy Debate'.

In order to lend support to the point that was previously illustrated under RO 1 (that which enumerated how divisive politics is supplemented by social media algorithms which create Confirmation Bias and Social Media Echo chambers), the next question was, *'When you come across political content on any social media platforms, does it primarily support your political views or differ from it?'* Here, a clear majority of 80% replied 'Varied, but generally supports my views'. This receives further support from the fact that only 6% replied that they come across content that goes against their views, showing that the curation of political content online is almost inevitable. Additionally, going as per the largely homogenous class background of the respondents, one may draw the conclusion that they are likely to be exposed to a particular kind of information and viewpoints that are widely held amongst their class, therefore resulting in echo chambers and their subsequent effects.

Post this, the researcher sought to understand individuals' online sharing habits with respect to their political views. 61% of respondents replied that they chose not to.

In the remaining 39%, 20 respondents replied 'I think we must use our social media platforms to spread awareness on political issues'. Of these, 15 belonged to the Gen Z category. 13 respondents answered in a similar vein, stating that 'In today's atmosphere, being apolitical is a luxury, thus we must share our political opinions online'. These two views go hand in hand and imply a desire to be vocal about political opinions. It is important to note the Gen Z category seemed to primarily hold this viewpoint, showcasing a difference in mindset compared to both Millennials and Gen X. These two primarily replied against sharing their views online at all (87%), as opposed to Gen Z's 44.8%. This denotes that the younger generation subscribes more to the idea of sharing personal political thoughts on social media platforms. However, one must acknowledge that the respondents have the freedom to debate whether or not they wish to share their views online as they have the luxury of not being directly affected (or affected in a grave manner) by them, owing to their upper-class status.

Zero respondents selected external validation as a factor for sharing their views online, thus probing the question of whether the researcher had overestimated the importance of instant gratification explored in RO 1, also considering that the other options were more relevant to the question posed here.

It is also worth thinking that with 61% overall not wishing to share their beliefs online, does that imply something about current politics' divisiveness? It is with this in mind that we shall proceed to the next question.

Upon examining the results, it was found that 22% of people replied that they do not share their beliefs publicly online in order to avoid arguments, while 31% replied they do not do so in fear

of today's tense political atmosphere. This clearly spells out that we are in a situation in our country today wherein people are wary of sharing political views so as not to ruffle feathers and fear of potent backlash, further confirming the point that there is a tenseness and polarisation being created amongst the people today. Building upon the researcher's previous point, it must be noted that the 31% statistic of those afraid of sharing views because of today's political atmosphere might have been much higher if the study was more class heterogenous.

While so far, the respondents had been asked regarding their thoughts about varied political beliefs' impact on their relations, it was necessary to understand their perception of their family's thoughts about this topic. This was to delve into how individuals viewed their family members' attitudes towards politics, political discussions, dissent in political views, and its impact. The goal was also to ascertain whether the phenomena under RO 1 had a role to play.

Thus, the questions sought to know whether the respondents' family members shared political views and content online, and if yes, what motivated them to do so. It was found that there was a gap in responses in the two questions, with 60% voting that family members did not share content online, but then 7 respondents of that 60% choosing explanations for family sharing content online, despite the previous answer. This could reflect an uncertainty about their family members' sharing patterns.

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Additionally, in relation to the previous concern about the relevance of external validation as a motivator for sharing political beliefs online, here it was found that interestingly, 11% of people *did* select instant gratification from others online as an option. This is to note, because as discussed previously, no one selected the same for explaining their own motivations, but they did feel that it was others' motivation and was responsible for their actions.

This could denote that while it is a motivator for sharing political content, it is not easy to accept it in oneself – therefore, it would make sense to conduct further studies on the role of instant online gratification in the field of political content sharing specifically.

Having explored opinions regarding family members' sharing habits with others online, it's time to delve into their sharing habits with the respondents. 40% of respondents replied that they have a family that shares political content with them, 38% who share it sometimes, and only 22% who do not share it at all. The degree to which political conversations are part of our daily life now can be seen through this. This is vital in depicting the media overexposure with respect to politics, as it can be seen that one does not just find such content on their social media fields or news channels, but also through personal messages such as these.

It is also worth noting that the Gen Z group had 62% of respondents voting yes, Millennials had just 25%, and Gen X had 37%. This means that the younger age group receives such messages much more from their older family members. Further studies could investigate why older people are more comfortable sharing such news with their family compared to the younger generation.

Gen Z is more comfortable sharing their political opinions on social media, largely driven by the belief that politics reflects the person one is; while Millennials and Gen X seem to be more comfortable sharing their political views with just family members. This could point towards an inter-generational difference in approach and variance in the understanding of the significance of politics. This ought to be explored further when it comes to varied understandings of the consequences of polarised politics in familial settings.

Probing further in the same line of questioning, the next question explored if sharing of such content on a personal basis gave rise to discussions of any kind. The results were telling, seeing that across all ages, only 17% voted that no discussions arose, meaning that the remainder engaged in some level of political discussion post content being shared. 15% answered that arguments arose, while 26% said they agree to disagree, denoting that overall, 41% faced unpleasant situations while discussing political matters. 40% answered a healthy debate. When we examine it from an age perspective, Gen Z is more likely to indulge in arguments or agreeing to disagree; while the older audience leans towards healthy debate. What the researcher is attempting to illustrate here is that the younger and older generation may have a gap in their *views* of how polarised political opinions are impacting their relationships. The very same questions were approached in different manners by the younger and older generations, following an identifiable pattern in both their behaviour. The younger generation tended to feel more strongly about the varied opinions, whereas the older generation was willing to view the varied views as less impactful for their relationships.

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the effect of the sharing of political content as discussed, the next question was: *'Do you think these discussions strengthen/weaken your personal views?'* The findings were enlightening, as they indicate the tension that gets created with respect to political discussions and thus showcases their subsequent effect.

43% of respondents stated that family members' point of views didn't affect their personal beliefs, while 38% said that they have to cautiously navigate interpersonal relationships and tread the waters carefully around opposing viewpoints. It must be observed that the 43% who remained unaffected by familial beliefs possessed the luxury to do so, which in part is due to their affluent background. 7% said that they rarely see their family's point of view and cannot accept their beliefs as they did not agree with them at all; 15% said they often saw their family's point of view, did not agree with it, but accepted it to prevent arguments; and 16% said they sometimes saw their family's point of view, but considered theirs more accurate, thus finding it difficult to alter their beliefs. This is quite telling as it shows that the difference in opinions is causing some level of friction. Accepting opposing views without contesting so as to maintain the peace is a direct indicator of the power of politics causing a strain upon relationships. The same is reflected via the 16% that found it difficult to alter their own beliefs, but felt pressured to do so upon hearing their families' thoughts. Only 5% of people were willing to alter their beliefs based on differing views. Lastly, the respondents who could not align their beliefs with their families at all, adds to the same and shows the level of polarisation and divisiveness prevalent today, thus furthering the central point of this paper.

In the final stages of the questionnaire, there was an attempt to obtain a very specific response to the question being explored, questioning *'Has there arisen a situation wherein such discussions/shared content has altered your relationship or perception of your family?'* It was found that 64% voted No, 26% Yes, and 10% voted Maybe. While 64% emphatically voted No, this is not completely aligned with the previous responses where people spoke of accepting beliefs to prevent arguments, and difficulty seeing eye to eye due to the lack of consensus of the beliefs. The understanding of the same is that when asked such a direct question, people find it difficult to be completely honest, for fear of the researcher judging their viewpoint. The stakes are higher with such a question, and as seen previously in questions where the answer could be construed negatively, people tended to answer more diplomatically and cautiously, despite being promised anonymity. We must also observe that amongst the people that voted Yes, 77% belonged to Gen Z, yet again ending support to the fact that younger people might be more ready to accept the toll of these differences than the older people, who either do not notice their family's discomfort or choose not to view it in such a severe manner.

Building further upon the previous question, it was found that 18% of respondents reported feeling angry/uncomfortable in such situations, 8% expressed major difficulty in seeing eye to eye about such matters, and 10% (total 36%) spoke about being unable to discuss any sort of

political matter with family at all, since they have previously affected their relationship adversely.

The reasoning for the familial relationships being unaffected quoted by the remaining 64% was majorly that the arguments that did crop up were small arguments that were resolved eventually. This is to be noted as it implies that while major differences do exist, they do not seem to be causing major rifts that are beyond repair. Suppose this finding is partially due to the diplomacy in responses. In that case, it must be solved through further studies to determine if the findings are replicated and to lend credibility to either side.

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The reason for this is at the same time, the impact of 36% cannot be dismissed and must be studied further with a more diverse audience, with certain questions being restructured in a manner that does not put the respondent on the defensive and instead allows them greater candour. This will enable a more in-depth understanding of the degree and extent of such an impact on familial relations, across generations. Additionally, variances in class must be taken into consideration – political differences resulting in serious rifts may be more prevalent across varied classes due to ideals of honour and respect, and ought to be explored.

Conclusion

Through the means of the two case studies and the results of the survey, it has emerged that the political climate within India today is one that is rather fraught with tension and debate. It is found that political discussions in India are frequent and can become heated, with social media serving simultaneously as a catalyst and an outlet for the same.

It becomes even clearer that the constant access to media creates Confirmation Bias and Echo Chambers on social media platforms, and alternately creates divisive viewpoints within the home. The advent of Fake News, overt news Sensationalization, and the rapid advancements in AI cause a breeding ground for divisive politics in the Indian context, as proved through the Case Study of the Abrogation of Article 370 and the India – China clash in the Galwan Valley.

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Therefore, there is no longer a question as to whether the political atmosphere is polarised within India or not – the resolute faith in one's beliefs alone while being unable to accept the other side is something that is widely found today. It is even clearer that this can be attributed to the easy access to media that is a part and parcel of 21st century existence. With multimedia advertising taking over the general advertising landscape, political advertising is not one to fall behind. Their job is to create an intolerance for dissent and to reduce acceptability and open-mindedness.

This unwillingness and almost inability to be open to varying political stances even within a familial setting has been enumerated through the difficult relations it causes. What is more worrisome still is that the result of these varied views is not being viewed/understood in the same manner across generations, thus causing a communication gap and the burying of these issues rather than tackling them.

We live in a world where new technological advancements occur frequently, and this may further increase news media's prevalence in our lives. However, it is our responsibility to educate ourselves on the role played by media sources in creating political intolerance that leads to rifts. In conclusion, the answer to the proposed research question speaks of a complicated interplay between media consumption, that causes political polarisation, and the subsequent impact on family dynamics. As per the findings, political ideas are sharpened through media saturation in this digital era, in turn contributing to at least some level of heightened tension within familial relations. Although there is not overwhelming agreement for the same, there are seeds that indicate the dissent is likely to grow as time passes. Thus, as we attempt to navigate this intricate relationship, it is essential to make personal attempts, aiming to encourage constructive dialogue and foster healthy discourse.

While that is on a personal level, on a much larger scale, it is the government's responsibility to provide checks and balances that prevent the spread of such misinformation. There is an urgent need to equip citizens with critical thinking abilities and take conclusive steps towards enhancing media literacy, beginning from a grassroots level and permeating to the everyday media users. Educational policies and independent schemes need to be put into place to help facilitate this, as the onus does not simply fall upon the people to educate themselves. Additionally, there is a need for more stringent checks and balances in the digital sphere and more activation participation from the government's IT cell. The sooner checks and balances are implemented, the better it would be for the future of Indian society and the fabric that wraps it together.

Scope for future research and recommendations

The primary drawback of this study was the small sample size with somewhat inequitable gender and age distribution. The research was also largely limited to the upper middle class of India, thus possibly influencing results in a particular manner.

As per the results of the survey, a pattern of the younger generation and older generations viewing the difference in political views with varying levels of seriousness and intensity was picked up, and it would be interesting to see whether it holds true.

There is also a degree of inter-generational difference in individuals' approach to politics and the prospect of sharing political content with the public online, studying which would tell us about the role of instant online gratification in the same.

The nature of the discussions that arise post the dissemination of political content amongst family ought to be explored further.

Lastly, finding an alternative for certain questions/conducting a study with an even greater degree of anonymity would greatly benefit the topic. The scope for further research in this field is vast and likely to bear promising results in the arena of media, politics and sociology in India.

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Cross-Generational Perspectives on Adolescent's Fashion: Changing Perceptions of Clothing Meaning Over Time

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Abstract

Perceptions about fashion have evolved throughout the years. This paper seeks to understand how meanings associated with clothing transform over time, providing insights into the significance associated with fashion and clothing choices across three pairs, belonging to Traditionalists, Baby boomer, Generation X, Y and Z within the Indian cultural context. Subsequently, the paper also seeks to examine the commonalities and differences in the perceptions of adolescent clothing through a cross-generational study of an Indian family. A structured interview was taken of the family in order to understand the underlying perceptions in accordance within the chosen theme of the paper. Data collected from the interviews, consisting of six members (three males and three females) indicate that variations and commonalities exist in each individual's insights. Through this exploration, the research advances an understanding of the intricate intergenerational dynamics that influenced fashion sensibilities and meanings in the context of an Indian family.

Keywords: Adolescent, Inter-Generation, Fashion, Fast Fashion, Sustainability, Family

Introduction

There has been a constant exertion of evolution in the field of fashion- shaping styles, following trends and influence of the DIY culture. This exertion of evolution is a response to our

surroundings that has perpetually been undergoing drastic changes over time. These changes are influenced by factors such as society, economy, generational perspectives and cultural beliefs. Fashion in a sense is '*contagious*' as its influence can drastically change an individual's perceptions about lifestyle, identity and expression (Kaur, 2016). In particular, children and adolescents' fashion has undergone dynamic changes owing to factors such as societal shifts, changes in perceptions and influence of social media trends. The meaning attributed in terms of clothing for these two categories of lifespan development is different in each generation.

One group that is most conscious about their style of clothing and their choice is the adolescents. The desire to be identified either as a cohort or an individual with a great fashion sense can be seen in adolescents (Maurya & Sharma, 2014). Adolescents begin to see trends surpassing social media as an influential force that helps them 'fit into' the group that shares similar behaviour, qualities and style (Solis, 2021).

Diana Solis, in her article addresses the pressure or the obligation felt by adolescents to conform to the trends on social media so as to fit in a group in order to prevent from being the odd one out or from being bullied (2021). A survey was conducted at the Urbana High School (UHS) with an aim to understand the differing opinions regarding outfits that can be worn in public and school. Results of the survey demonstrate that 16.7% of respondents depend on circumstances, 33.3% are unconcerned, and 50% occasionally worry about their appearance. 8.3% of respondents felt obligated to dress for school, whereas 33.3% view it as situational, 25% agree, and 33.3% refute a duty to dress. Remarkably, 75% of respondents emphasize personal comfort over passing fads and oppose the idea that one must adopt the newest trends in order to fit in. This difference in viewpoints is indicative of how the adolescent fashion is changing, with comfort and individual expression signifying a broader cultural movement.

Significance

The present-day fashion industry is cyclical and dynamic. By examining trends, influences, and shifts in people's opinions about clothes, cross-generational research helps to clarify consumer behaviour. Comprehending the dynamic importance of attire facilitates disentangling the complex connections among individual expression, societal conventions, and vogue fads. It clarifies how global influences, technical breakthroughs, and cultural values impact fashion choices for all ages. Understanding adolescent fashion is essential as teenagers negotiate peer acceptability, identity construction, and cultural expectations.

In light of changing consumer behaviour and lifestyles, it is imperative to comprehend cross-generational viewpoints in children's fashion. Being a member of Generation Z, the authors lack historical context, and believe that researching children's fashion over time will help one understand the cultural and socioeconomic changes influencing these developments. This

method investigates the evolution of children's fashion, offering insights into the relationship between conventional and contemporary shopping behaviours as well as the changing meaning of fashion.

The article "Childhood, Work, and Schooling: Some Reflections," by Vasanta, deepens one's knowledge of how cultural norms have shaped how important clothing is for kids. It shows how children's roles have changed over time, moving from being economic contributors in the past to the emphasis on leisure and education that exists today. Vasanta's research highlights the importance of children's clothing as a representation of their duties and provides insights into their dressing patterns, thanks to the historical context it reveals. The observations also show how contemporary elements like technology, communication, and urbanization interact with established social norms. The complicated environment of today shapes children's clothing choices and meanings through the interaction of historical expectations with modern problems and opportunities (2004).

The dynamics of adolescent fashion have evolved over the years with different generations having their own meanings, perspectives and traditions when it comes to fashion and the term 'clothing'. This paper aims to understand how meanings associated with clothing have transformed over time; across three pairs, each belonging to a different generation within the Indian cultural setting. Additionally, insight can be gained by understanding the commonalities and differences in perceptions of adolescent clothing, thus highlighting the complex relationship between cultural upheavals, societal changes, and wardrobe choices of the current youth.

The study's introduction is centred around a comprehensive understanding of the clothing in India along with the meaning of the term 'clothing'. Furthermore, adolescent clothing within the Indian cultural context is also explained. The different generations being studied are also elucidated within the context of Indian cultural setting.

Tapestry of Fashion and Clothing In India

Apart from being merely functional, clothing also acts as a quiet messenger of one's personality, cultural identity, and social mores. Its importance has changed over time, taking into account various individual perspectives, societal values, and cultural changes. Clothing has evolved beyond its basic necessity as it now integrates with the current trends that reflect broader socio-cultural diversity (Tripathi, 2017).

India's diverse religious landscape, long history, and legacy of handicrafts are the roots of the country's eclectic fashion tradition. In the Vedic era, ladies adorned themselves with belts, pleated garments, shawls, and draped fabrics (Tyagi, 2017). Stitched garments became prominent post the Gupta Kingdom thus refining the clothing and dressing style. Each clothing piece from

different regions of the country demonstrated the depth of artistic creativity ingrained in India's cultural tapestry. These works serve as artistic expressions in addition to depicting various historical eras. Both the royal family and the general public in the Mughal empire embraced grandeur and beauty in their clothing throughout Akbar's reign (Choudhary & Rao, 2020).

Traditional clothing such as the sari, ghagra choli, and dhoti continued to be popular in post-independence India alongside contemporary styles as designers experimented with cutting-edge cuts, materials, and decorations. Indian fashion was greatly influenced by the likes of Ritu Kumar and Satya Paul, who skillfully combined traditional craftsmanship with modern trends (IGNOU – The People's University, n.d.). Indian fashion gained international prominence for its distinctive fusion of innovation and legacy thanks to this blending of the old and the new. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a cultural revolution in cities like Delhi and Mumbai, where people accepted Western ideas while maintaining their Indian traditions (Choudhary & Rao, 2020). This shift was mostly embraced by the adolescents in that particular period as by then the influence from media-Bollywood in particular had begun to set in. Films such as 'Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak' (1988), and 'Dostana' (1980), left a lasting impression on the Indian cinema as well as the fashion industry. Dresses particularly of white colours and floral prints had become popular amongst adolescents at that time. The film 'Dostana' (1980), prominently featured the trend of bell-bottom pants during the disco scenes, capturing adolescents and prompting them to embrace this aesthetic.

Adolescent fashion is changing today due to the combination of global fashion trends and media impact. Adolescents use a more independent approach to style, utilizing their clothing as a vehicle of self-expression, as opposed to following cultural conventions. Inspired by social media, international fashion trends, and influencers, they choose clothes that express their individuality, relationships with their peers, and respect for variety (Badaoui et al., 2016).

As adolescent fashion is explored, it is understood that each generation actively participates in and influences the evolving narrative of fashion. This generational contribution is particularly pronounced during adolescence, due to factors such as social beliefs, economic conditions and familial traditions. Adolescent fashion leads one to such a conclusion as the period is marked by heightened receptivity and expressiveness wherein they try to integrate and re-adapt changes taking place in their environment into their identity and fashion choices.

Fashion continues to be an influential form of communication and expression for the adolescents. Comprehending these transitions offers significant perspectives on the generational intricacies that persistently shape the constantly evolving realm of adolescent fashion.

The Generational Framework

According to Erikson (2009), a generation is made up of people who, at the same age and with similar life experiences, belong to the same historical epoch. Using generational frameworks like Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z, the population is frequently divided into discrete cohorts. Significant historical occurrences, innovations in technology, changes in culture, and social upheavals that took place during these groups' formative years—particularly in the early stages of adolescence—define them. Prior to the creation of generational frameworks, age groups and life phases were used by society to classify people (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010).

National characteristics vary greatly, even though the generational structure is universal. People born in the United States between 1928 and 1945 are referred to as Traditionalists (Cantrell, 2021). On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent civil disobedience movement for independence, the end of British rule, and Gandhi's killing were all experienced by teenagers in India during this period. Strong feelings of patriotism characterized this period as Indian customs were brought back to life and a democratic republic was established. However, a poor economy, low literacy rates, pervasive poverty, and a stop to industrial progress made living conditions difficult in India. Following traditions was a key to success as one navigated the complexity of this newly developing India (Erickson, 2009).

The Baby Boomer generation—those born in 1946 and 1960–1964—saw tremendous shifts in society. Adolescents in the United States were impacted by the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, while Indira Gandhi's leadership in India ushered in a socialist economy. With few options in a struggling economy, adolescents' decisions were frequently influenced by caste, community, or family. Seeking financial success frequently meant going abroad for work and school in the US, UK, or Middle East (Erickson, 2009).

Born between 1961/1965 and 1979, *Generation X* experienced profound shifts in worldwide society. Teenagers had to deal with economic hardships in the United States and political unrest in India after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Amidst economic uncertainty and rapid changes in the surrounding, individuals born in this era in India were the first group to experience a digital revolution (Warren, 2022). For instance, early economic liberalization policies began to occur leading to implementation of digital adoption, providing new employment opportunities. Breaking down obstacles based on gender and caste, accessible education started (Erickson, 2009).

The generation commonly referred to as *Millennials* or *Generation Y* was born between 1980/1981 and 1995/1996, during which time technology became widely available, making them the most globally comparable generation to date. This generation's increased awareness of terrorism inspired them to live life to the fullest. Teenagers in the US benefited from a robust economy and a pro-child culture that encouraged positivity and goal-oriented conduct.

Adolescents in India gained an understanding of global significance in the meantime due to the growing middle class, rising consumer demand, and greater production (Erickson, 2009).

Born between the middle of the 1990s and the middle of the 2010s, *Generation Z* has been greatly impacted by technology, especially social media and the internet. This has influenced their viewpoints and fostered a strong feeling of individualism in both India and the United States. This generation has witnessed the swift growth of the digital world in India, characterized by pervasive smartphone and internet usage. This expansion has been greatly aided by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), especially in the areas of internet and telecommunications innovation (Erickson, 2009).

Born from the mid-2010 onwards are referred to as *Generation Alpha*. This generation both in the United States and in India are expected to be more technologically adept than Generation Z. This is also owing to the fact that Artificial Intelligence has come into the limelight, thus impacting their interpersonal relationships as well as their perspectives on their surroundings (Erickson, 2009). Additionally, the mindset of this generation with respect to fashion is different from generational groups. Gen Z is leading the way in the transition to sustainable practices and mindful consumption. This trend is best exemplified by upcycling old sarees into chic, contemporary clothing that emphasizes originality, ingenuity, and environmental responsibility. Redefining wardrobes to promote a more ethical and environmentally conscious world, young generations are adopting repurposed clothes and sustainable behaviours (R, 2024).

The Intergenerational Influence

Intergenerational influence refers to the influence of a generation on another in terms of skills, preferences, values. Chadha (2004), in his paper elaborates the status and function of the elderly within family and community institutions as providers of wisdom and information. The support that families once provided for their elderly has diminished as Asian nations and regions grow economically and urbanize. These transitory changes have also been witnessed on the Indian subcontinent. Families maintain cultural traditions and ways of life while upholding social hierarchy rules where the elderly play a major role, even in the face of changes in the structures and functions of Indian society. Furthermore, because they are revered as stores of knowledge and experience, the elderly continue to be respected and have a significant role in both family and community settings.

This influence can be seen through the way of exercising parental control over the other members of the family. According to Mittal and Royne, intergenerational influence (IGI) outcomes are highly moderated by the quality of family relationships. In contrast to families with low family relationship quality, those with high family relationship quality experience stronger IGI consequences. These results, which support and expand on the body of knowledge already

available on IGI and offer fresh avenues for future investigation, are important for theory as well as practice. They stress the significance of family dynamics in forming these patterns and the long-lasting effects of early parental influence on consumption behaviours (2010).

A general overview of the literature suggests that a varying proportion of the generations have conflicting ideas and views about fashion. This study explores how meanings associated with clothing transform over time along with examining the commonalities/differences that come across for adolescent clothing. To completely understand the ideas of adolescent clothing across several generations, this literature review is focused on generational influence on fashion, influence through digital media and frugality emerging in the cultural context.

Generational stratification is often defined in the context of socio-cultural and historical framework particularly to gain insights from individuals about their formative years (Warren & Hauser, 1997). In the context of clothing, generational stratification helps in highlighting factors that may have affected their clothing consumption during their formative years. Additionally, it also helps in understanding traits that may eventually be carried forward in further generations. Furthermore, cultural influences via the means of colours also affect the clothing choices across generations. A study conducted in 2017, aimed at understanding the perception of colours in fashion through comparison across generational cohorts – Baby Boomers and Generation Y. The study employed a quasi-experimental survey method using a seven-point Likert scale. Eight colours were added to the sample clothing image: four cool colours (white, teal, blue, and black) and four warm colours (red, yellow, orange, and brown). Results from the study revealed that both the generational cohorts displayed similar perceptions of colours in terms of warm-cold, soft-hard, young-old and fashionable-unfashionable scales. However, the perceptions of colour differed significantly, while testing the first hypothesis (H1). For example, Baby Boomers preferred orange-coloured apparel more than Generation Y, and there was a significant difference in the two groups' preferences for the colour orange. The two generations had differing perceptions about brown apparel, with Generation Y considering it to be outdated and out of style. The second hypothesis (H2)'s multiple regression analysis results showed that colour preferences were substantially correlated with self-esteem and fashion engagement. Preference for red apparel related to higher degrees of fashion participation and self-esteem. Although a generational cohort may prefer a particular clothing item of a certain colour, it may always not be perceived as fashionable and vice-versa. However, the findings of this study may differ across a country like India due to the diversity and versatility of cultures and colours. For instance, clothing that has the colour brown may be perceived as dull and old; however, monks and ascetics wear clothing apparels consisting of brown and saffron robes (Chang & Shin, 2017).

Apart from family, an important relationship exists between motherhood and fashion. Mothers play a significant role in their adolescents' clothing choices and consumer socialization (Appelford, 2015). As suggested by Corrigan (1989) and Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005), this

relationship comes to its testing period during adolescence. Social groups and peers are often known as an ‘influential source’ of decision making for adolescents. This influence further leads to either conflicts or shifts in preferences of clothing choices. Despite these hurdles, the bond between mothers and daughters with regard to clothing choices resurfaces in adulthood. Research by Woodward (2007) and Clarke and Miller (2002) revealed that adult daughters often turn to their mothers for guidance and encouragement when it comes to fashion decisions. This relationship demonstrates how moms continue to have an impact on their daughters’ fashion choices long after the rebellious adolescent years (Appleford, 2015).

Adolescent fashion for the youth belonging to the current generation is heavily influenced by social media and its platforms. A major factor that contributes to influencing the Gen Z youth is ‘influencer marketing’. Often thought of as role models, influencers lure the adolescents into wearing clothing items that may often be against the family or society’s ideals (Letko, 2019). A study conducted in Haryana investigated a similar issue – how social media and technology are influencing the quick growth of Indian youth fashion. The study examined how young people’s fashion choices are influenced by internet platforms and globalization, specifically in relation to the Indian film industry, through qualitative research. It exposed disagreements about fashion choices inside families, which are caused by attitudes that differ between parents and children. Parents who uphold traditional values place a premium on modesty and traditional clothes, frequently choosing for their daughters to wear traditional Indian garb. Young people, on the other hand, are motivated to express themselves and are impacted by global fashion trends; they consider looks like markers of modernity. Parents struggle to strike a balance between upholding traditional values and fostering their children’s individuality because of these divergent points of view. Indian adolescents continue to look to their families for approval despite the adoption of global styles, underscoring the complex relationship that exists between cultural norms, family relationships, and individual choices (Gill et al., 2023).

Passing down clothes from one generation to another has always been a tradition of families across the world. While some call it the act of preservation or sustainability, others may label it as a frugal action. Although fashion may remain the same, the methods through which the consumption and purchase is done by each generation may slightly differ from each other (Fowler et al., 2014). A study conducted in 2020 aimed at identifying the purchase and consumption behaviour of vintage products of the Baby Boomer Generations and the Gen Z. Face to face interviews, through a semi-structured questionnaire, were employed for this study. The study outlines the lifestyle and consumption behaviour of both the generations through traits such as individualistic, tech-savvy, workaholics etc. The subject of the study was vintage products. Results reveal that Baby Boomers reason out their consumption and behaviour patterns via the authenticity, quality and durability of the products. In contrast to baby boomers, Generation Z places importance on the image – consuming products to enhance their style and individuality. Although the study may not have direct relevance to the current objectives of this

paper, this study highlights characteristics and conditions that influenced both the generations in their consumption and behaviour patterns (Leovaridis et al., 2020).

A research conducted at Hamburg University of Technology examined India's role as a pioneer in frugal innovation—a notion that is becoming more popular in academia because of its connection to India. In several industries, India is known for valuing price over quality, which is consistent with the “lead market” notion. India's economic and cultural tendency to solve everyday issues using resource-efficient techniques creates an atmosphere that is favourable for frugal solutions. In order to comprehend India's dominance in affordable inventions, this study explores the lead market hypothesis, emphasizing the interplay between economic variables and cultural values. Empirical observations from Indian students highlight the role that culture plays in the adoption of frugal innovation, demonstrating how India's distinct economic and cultural fusion positions it as a leader in the global market for low-cost solutions (Tiwari, 2016a).

Generational disparities are a crucial aspect for organisations and lawmakers to take into account, from retail choices to sustainability concerns.

Research Question and Objectives of the Study

Having gained insight into adolescent fashion as well as the generational framework in the Indian cultural context, this study aims to understand the commonalities and differences in perceptions of clothing through cross-generational comparisons. Additionally, the paper also seeks to understand how the meaning of clothing changed across generations in the Indian cultural setting. The study employs interviews as its primary research method. The qualitative nature of this methodology aims to achieve the study's objective by a thorough case analysis. By employing interviews as its research method, the author aims to gain insights as to how perspectives across generations relate to the evolving meaning of clothing in the context of adolescent fashion in India. Furthermore, the themes identified are comprehended in light of the conclusions of existing literature, that includes journals, articles and research papers.

Methodology

The research approach used to get the required primary data is interviews, given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study. The sample representative for this study was an Indian family, residing in Pune. The author had prior acquaintance with the family, however preserved objectivity while conducting the interviews. A family was chosen as the sample size for the study of adolescent fashion in order to obtain personal and related viewpoints in a comfortable setting. Families are by their very nature anatomies of generational variation, providing a special perspective on how attitudes toward clothes change as people age in a common family and cultural environment. By looking at families as a whole, it is possible to investigate shared

values, traditions, and sartorial preferences and determine whether particular fashion interests have been handed down over the years. This demonstrates how social variables change or repeat throughout time. Examining multigenerational households provides a special chance to examine how clothing meanings have changed throughout time in many socio cultural circumstances. Individual views on fashion are moulded by shared memories and familial ties, resulting in a complex interplay of influences within the family.

Prior consent was taken from the family before they agreed to share their experiences via recorded audio interviews. In total, six members of the family were interviewed for this study. Three female participants whose age was 70, 48 and 20 years respectively and three male participants whose age was 78, 59 and 25 years respectively were interviewed for this research. The participants were born in different cities, with two participants belonging to Generation Z i.e., one male and one female were both born in Pune. Data collected from these participants provided a variety of viewpoints and experiences regarding adolescents' fashion, enabling a more thorough comprehension of how ideas about the meaning of clothes have changed over time in various geographic and generational contexts.

Procedure and Analysis

After understanding about the goals of the study, participants consented to take part in it anonymously. An outline of the subjects to be covered preceded the interview procedure, which was then followed by a structured questionnaire. Data collected was in Konkani and was further translated to English. Common themes were found and gathered after the coded data and recordings were examined. The data was scrutinised in order to construct a main thesis that addressed the study issue.

Secondary data, particularly relevant literature, was used to provide a thorough theoretical framework that supported and complemented the experiences of the respondents.

Limitations of the Method

Conducting interviews within a family setting for a cross-generational study presents certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Family interviews may unintentionally result in social desirability bias, as respondents may feel pressured to give answers that conform to social norms. This bias may make people reluctant to share information about their experiences pertaining to the study's objectives that deviate from the norm or to voice opposing views, which could affect how reliable the data is gathered. Additionally, it could be difficult to record a variety of viewpoints in family interviews, particularly if there are prevailing voices or a family narrative that might obscure individual experiences.

Summary of Interviews

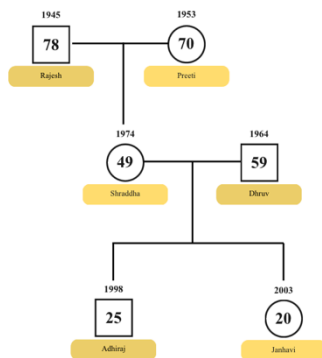
The following analysis involves human-subject research wherein, the results from the six participants' interviews are compiled and subjected to a methodical analysis. Additionally, a detailed analysis and comprehension of the common and unique narratives from the participant's experiences are also mentioned. These elements reveal how their personal experiences have impacted decisions such as purchasing clothes for their children when they reached adolescence.

Background of the family

The grandparents hailed from Karwar, Karnataka who eventually relocated to Pune after the grandfather's retirement from the Indian Police Services. Their twin children were raised in Pune, however they occasionally travelled back to their hometown in Karwar. The second twin, Shraddha got married to Dhruv who was born and raised in Belgaum, Karnataka, and lived in Saudi Arabia at the time of his marriage. Dhruv and his wife reared their children, Adhiraj and Janhavi, in Thane for familial reasons. Adhiraj and Janhavi were born in Pune. Compared to his sibling and cousins, Adhiraj had a greater opportunity to explore as the family's first grandchild.

One can see a shift in demographics of all these individuals which in-turn brings in individual and generational differences owing to clothing styles and significance of clothing. This shift highlights shifting views of clothing that are based in societal, cultural, and individual circumstances in addition to shifts in fashion tastes.

Figure 1: *Family Genogram*



Narrative of Male Fashion

Over the span of three generations, fashion trends have changed dramatically. At first, clothes represented social mobility and continuity and were frequently handed down through family. Despite initial resistance, the appearance of jeans and T-shirts signalled a trend towards freedom

and rebellion by progressively adopting Western ideas. Globalisation and social media have given the younger generation more opportunity to showcase their individuality through their wardrobe choices. These days, fashion trends are cyclical, with retro and vintage looks coming back, even in the face of economic hardship. Important cultural icons, such as Bollywood singers and musicians, have a big say in what people wear. This is indicative of a larger trend in culture away from modesty and tradition in fashion and toward individualism and self-expression. Beyond its utilitarian purpose, fashion is a dynamic medium for expressing individuality across generations.

Narratives of female fashion

The participant's responses through three generations of fashion show how cultural changes, societal conventions, and financial limitations have an impact. Early on, wearing Punjabi salwar kameez was restricted due to financial constraints. The conservative societal ideals of traditional values, modesty, and simplicity were mirrored in the requirement for parental consent for unorthodox clothes. The carefree fashions of youth are compared with modern clothes, which emphasizes identity and self-expression. Celebrities and social media have shaped modern trends, which depart from custom. It is said that fashion is ageless, ever-changing, and that every generation adds to a wide-ranging, inclusive mosaic of looks.

Modesty and parental role

One predominant theme that was common across all the generations in terms of purchasing and consumption patterns was modesty and parental control.

When it comes to Rajesh (78) and Preeti (70), their grandparents both underlined the value of modesty and parental guidance when it came to their teenage wardrobe choices. Preeti(70) emphasized modesty by pointing out that clothes had the function of covering the body. She also emphasized the impact of parental direction on her wardrobe choices, stating that they wore whatever their parents gave them without objecting. According to Preeti(70), societal norms also had a big influence on their choice of clothing.

Reiterating the value of modesty, Rajesh(78) characterised it as a kind of tacit endorsement. Silent nods and nonverbal clues were frequently employed in place of spoken words to express acceptance or disapproval of attire choices.

In their memories of their upbringing and parenthood, Shraddha(49) and Dhruv(50) emphasise the value of modesty and parental direction when it comes to fashion choices. Shraddha remembers how her parents, who placed a strong emphasis on modesty, were crucial in deciding what they wore during their teens. Similar to this, Dhruv recalls that he was raised with a subtle

instillation of humility because he was taught to wear hand-me-downs from elders rather than having his own wardrobe. But when it came to dressing their own kids, the couple made sure that the clothes they bought were modest and not too exposed.

In the case of Adhiraj(25) and Janhavi(20) i.e., The siblings' modesty and parental role was reflected via their clothes bought for them by their parents. Dhruv mentioned that he would try his luck to convince his parents to buy clothing items such as drawstring pants, flannel shirts and graphic tees, however his parents wouldn't agree for buying such clothes as they radiated a hipster look which according to them was not decent. Janhavi mentioned that she did not have any such demands when it came to clothing and often wore what was purchased by her parents.

Influence of media and entertainment

Influence from media and entertainment was another theme that came common across the generations.

Preeti(70) had a desire to wear a Punjabi salwar kameez which during her adolescence was not economically feasible and approved by her family members. Punjabi salwar in her youth was considered as a luxurious apparel and the designs were heavily influenced from Bollywood. Rajesh(78) on the other hand had a desire to wear a set of pants and shirt which was again influenced by a Bollywood movie 'Challia' (1960), starring Raj Kapoor and Nutan. This, again, was not an accessible form of clothing due to financial constraints.

Shraddha(49) had a desire to own a white dress worn by the lead actress in the Bollywood film, 'Qayamat se Qayamat Tak' (1988). However, the concept of dresses in a familial background had not set in, resulting in the participant not being able to wear or buy such dresses. Dhruv(59), on the other hand was greatly influenced by the Bollywood celebrity, Amitabh Bachchan and would try to recreate his styles and looks. He recalls a memory wherein he stitched his normal collared shirts into rounded collared shirts as it had become very famous due to Amitabh Bachchan. Additionally, he was very much influenced by Boney M's outfits in the songs 'Daddy Cool' and 'Rasputin'. He would try recreating bell-bottom pants by attaching an extra piece of fabric to create the flamboyant look.

Adhiraj(25) mentioned that he was influenced by music bands such as Pink Floyd and often looked forward to wearing clothes such as flannel shirts, graphic tees. On the other hand Janhavi (20) was influenced by trends on social media platforms such as wearing heavy accessories, wearing chokers etc.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, also impacted Generation Z's clothing styles and aesthetics. This has given them a wide array of choices to choose from rather than

sticking to old traditions like passed-down. Social media influencers to an extent have also impacted the purchasing choices of Generation Z.

Self-expression and individualism

Self-expression and Individualism was a theme that became common for Generation Y and Z.

Adhiraj(25), had adopted individuality and self-reliance due to an increasing consciousness of puberty and adolescent patterns. He wanted to expand his wardrobe with flannel shirts, Doc Martens, and tattered pants, all inspired by the grunge era. Comparably, Janhavi (20) admitted that social media, globalisation, and influencer trends had shaped her fashion choices. She also credits these factors to social networking and international pop culture. Comfort and individuality in clothing are important to Generation Z, who express themselves through nonconformist clothing choices.

Utilitarianism and frugality across generations

The debate of clothing as a need vs. want could be seen across the generations.

For Preeti(70) and Rajesh(78), clothes were invented due to its utilitarian nature. Limited clothing selections and hand-me-downs emphasised clothes as a sign of social advancement and continuity of traditions. Tradition, modesty, and financial limitations made a significant impact on fashion choices; individualism and self-expression were subordinated. Individuality or expressive personality was not prioritised; instead, clothing was meant to be useful and long-lasting.

When it comes to their wardrobe selections, Shraddha (49) and Dhruv (59) were perfect examples of utilitarianism, putting utility and practicality above beauty. This viewpoint was indicative of a “need vs. wants” mentality, in which essentials come before wants, particularly in hard times. To demonstrate this, Dhruv (59) tells the story of how, despite being on a tight budget, he had to make do with a piece of flair fabric that looked comparable. This do-it-yourself method emphasises independence. Shraddha (49), who likewise has budgetary constraints, eschews ostentatious and stylish attire, exhibiting a pragmatic approach to attire.

Adhiraj (20) and Janhavi’s (25) wardrobe selections show a trend toward quick fashion and Western influences. Although practicality is still crucial, a new dynamic has been introduced by the influence of Western fashion trends. Their choices are nonetheless influenced by financial limitations. Unlike previous generations, their fashion identities are greatly influenced by technology, especially social media. This represents a careful balancing act between the growing need for personal expression and pragmatism.

Several universal themes remain in opinions about what to wear throughout eras. However, external factors like the media, societal conventions, and cultural standards have a big say in these decisions. Parental approbation and cultural and household standards influence dress choices. Conversations frequently centred on the cyclical nature of styles and changing trends in fashion. While self-expression and individualism are appreciated by younger generations, modesty in attire was treasured by past generations. There is a persistent interest in fashion as a form of self-expression that emphasises individuality despite age differences.

Discussion

The data collected from the interviews have brought out several themes that have impacted adolescent fashion choices across the generations.

The importance of clothes has changed over generations as a result of alterations in societal dynamics, personal views, and cultural standards. At first, clothes were worn for practical reasons, mostly to cover up the body when options were few and money was tight. Dress standards prioritised practicality above individual expression, emphasising modesty and conformity. However, as media impact increased, people started to embrace bright, varied styles as a way to express and identify themselves rather than adhering to rigid utilitarianism. The fashion business was further spurred by globalisation and the widespread influence of digital and social media, which created a more diverse and interconnected environment. In contrast to other generations, the current generation embraces comfort, freedom, and deviance from social standards; this is in line with broader societal trends that highlight individuality and diversity in fashion.

One noticeable tradition that is rooted within Indian families is that of frugality. The acceptance of frugality in India has been influenced by the country's cultural norms that value simplicity. The concept of frugality within the Indian cultural context is more about the preservation and optimum utilisation of resources for future generations. A classic example of this would be the hands-me-down tradition. In the past, the common joint family structure in Indian culture encouraged family members to share resources, such as clothes (Niranjan et al., 1998). The family manages its wardrobe needs by leveraging the cyclical nature of apparel, especially among siblings, aligning with India's ingrained values of sustainability and modest living. This approach resonates with middle-class consumption patterns. According to Deshpande, the idea of a middle class is subjective, defined by individual intentions rather than purely economic factors (2004). Initially, marketers viewed the middle class solely as a lucrative consumer group, but the reality proved more complex over time. The middle class encompasses diverse economic strata, varied preferences, and a culture emphasizing sustainability and thrift. In India, the tradition of passing down clothes across generations significantly shapes consumption habits, highlighting

the importance of sustainability practices like reusing and repurposing clothing. Middle-class dynamics involve a nuanced interplay of sustainability, culture, and economics, challenging simplistic consumer categorisations. This complexity prompts a re-evaluation of marketing strategies, as Indian middle-class households prioritise sustainable practices and modest living.

The concept of frugality in the Indian cultural context can also be viewed through Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory that identifies six cultural dimensions – Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Normative Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint. This approach evaluates cultural variations according to society ideals, impacting actions and attitudes in a range of contexts, including the workplace, interpersonal relationships, and communication (Tiwari, 2016b). Rajnish Tiwari, in his study “Frugality in Indian Context: What Makes India a Lead Market for Affordable Excellence”, applies Hofstede's model to cross-verify the concept of frugality from anecdotal evidence from both ancient India and modern day India. Ancient Indians, as described by the Greek geographer Strabo, valued thriftiness and elegance in dress. This cultural inclination towards the frugal use of clothing continues in modern India. In modern India, the notions of thrift and austerity persist, as noted by veteran British Broadcasting Corporation correspondent Mark Tully (Vittal, 2011); (Tiwari, 2016b). The emphasis on affordable yet elegant clothing emphasises a continuity of ideals, demonstrating how past perceptions of ingenuity in clothing have influenced and continue to influence the fashion sensibilities of succeeding Indian generations.

When it comes to influence from media and its forms, the young culture finds ways to become a part of their favourite band or group. McRobbie in her article, “Fashion Culture: Creative Work, Female Individualization” contends that the fashion industry has changed as a result of globalisation, giving rise to a young culture that is more varied and interconnected (2002). The way that teenagers adopt international fashion trends is a reflection of how much global media and digital platforms have shaped their choices. Cross-generational viewpoints show that globalisation has had a considerable impact on fashion due to the quick flow of cultural ideas. Teenagers today appear to be exposed to a wider range of fashion influences that cut over national and cultural barriers, as evidenced by the more cosmopolitan and diverse attitude exhibited by Generation Y and Z, in contrast to earlier generations who frequently favour traditional values in their fashion choices.

Additionally, the vocabulary used by artists also has an impact on teenage fashion. For instance, Pink Floyd's distinctive psychedelic soundscapes and provocative lyrics. Teenagers sometimes take cues from the band's unusual and alluring record artwork, adopting these designs into their outfits and accessories. The band's cultural significance is further highlighted by Pink Floyd's lasting influence on fashion, which highlights the complex interplay between style, identity, and music during adolescence (Hebdige, 1995). This is evident in the grandson's clothing style.

Bands such as Pink Floyd helped such adolescents often adopt a countercultural aesthetic and forward-thinking musical mood. This pattern is consistent with studies that highlight the symbolic significance of music in forming young people's identities, such as Hebdige's groundbreaking work on subcultures (1995). This choice of clothing reflects a deeper affinity with the values and identity linked with the band's songs and image rather than just following trends.

The increased awareness of puberty and adolescence within social circles and educational institutions highlights the importance of clothes in social integration. The experiences of Adhiraj (25) and Janhavi (20) are relevant to a study that aims to investigate how teenagers' social and personal identities influence their opinions of clothing brands and things. The conceptual framework of this study takes into account both individual characteristics like gender and grade level, as well as conventional variables like family, peers, the media, and celebrities. Results obtained from the analysis of a sample of 1,596 French high school students show that: (i) identity is important in deciding how much value is placed on products and brands; (ii) personal and social identities function as mediators; and (iii) gender and grade level have moderating effects. A summary of theoretical developments, real-world applications, and recommendations for additional study are included in the conclusion (The influence of personal and social identity on the clothing consumption of adolescents: Influence of personal and social identity on clothing consumption of adolescents, 2016). Adolescent fashion and self-expression are closely related, as evidenced by the effect of external sources such as music scenes and media, as well as the desire to belong to a social group. The focus that Generation Z places on comfort and personal style in their clothing selections defies traditional expectations.

However, it should also be noted that not every media personality or influencer or musician would have a similar impact on generational cohorts or an individual as a whole. This can be best illustrated by taking Justin Bieber's laidback style in 2021 (Maoui, 2021). Even if Justin Bieber has won multiple awards in the music business, not all of his admirers will adopt his style, particularly if the apparel is pricey. This conclusion is reinforced by academic studies on the impact of media on fashion decisions. The complex interplay between media and consumer behaviour is revealed by studies in media and fashion sociology. Katz argues that the idea of "selective exposure" implies that people consciously select the media that they interact with, based on their interests, lifestyle, and financial situation. Because of this, fans might not always copy the fashion sense of a media figure because their wardrobe choices are influenced by a variety of personal and contextual circumstances (1959).

Essentially, the discussion sheds light on the complex fabric of Indian society, where thrift is not just a way of life but also a deeply held cultural ideal that determines how people consume, how they dress, and how long they hold onto their values. The Indian cultural fabric is firmly

ingrained with the notion of frugality, which guides teenagers as they manage the complexities of global influences, internet platforms, and changing tastes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how the meanings associated with clothing have transformed over time, providing insights into the significance associated with fashion and sartorial choices across three generations within the Indian cultural context. The secondary objective of this paper was to examine the commonalities and differences in the perceptions of adolescent clothing through a cross-generational study of an Indian family.

The study emphasises how crucial it is to take historical and contextual elements into account in order to completely understand the complex meanings connected to fashion. Clothing symbolism reveals the complex ways in which clothing changes over time since it is intricately entwined with cultural and social circumstances. The study paradigm that is being provided here provides valuable insights into the dynamic interaction that exists between children's fashion and generational attitudes.

It draws attention to the multifaceted role that clothing plays in childhood, beyond its utilitarian use as a medium for expressing one's cultural, societal, and personal identities. Even though the fashion business changes, some things never change. Fashion is cyclical, as seen by the comeback of vintage and retro trends, which show how today's generation absorbs and adapts past patterns. Fashion continues to be a powerful tool for self-expression for all generations, with a growing focus on individualism. Furthermore, financial limitations still have an impact on fashion choices, highlighting the long-lasting influence of money on apparel choices.

Future studies in this area could examine the effects of shifting views on the significance of clothes on teenagers' identity formation in light of these cross-generational viewpoints. A more thorough grasp of the intricate dynamics at work in transforming the meaning of clothing throughout time may also be obtained by looking at how global influences and technology improvements affect fashion perceptions across generations. All things considered, this study establishes the framework for further investigation into the complex interplay among fashion, generational viewpoints, and societal changes.

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper itself. Additionally, the names of the family members have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Examining the Efficacy of Humanitarian Carve-Outs Within the United Nations Sanctions Regime

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Abstract

This paper presents the research question of analyzing the efficacy of humanitarian carve-outs within the United Nations sanctions regime as presented by resolution 2664. More than a year has passed since the United Nations Security Council approved the resolution, and therefore, it is important to present an efficacy analysis to improve the policy or even improve its implementation. The paper begins by providing a brief background into the issue and then explains the research question. The broad research question is divided into two sub-questions. The first examines how the resolution has changed access to humanitarian aid, whereas the second investigates if the passing of the resolution has affected the delivery of humanitarian aid on the ground. Thereupon, the literature review summarizes and evaluates existing literature tracing nuances of accessing and providing humanitarian aid. While there is a substantial body of literature on humanitarian aid, given the contemporary nature of the topic, there is an absence of literature examining the efficacy of resolution 2664. Further, the research method section presents that primary research through semi-structured qualitative interviews of convenience sampling and secondary research is used to answer the research questions. The research finds that asset freeze measures under the sanctions regime have more disadvantages than advantages. Similarly, even though resolution 2664 is a historical win theoretically, questions remain unanswered about its practical implementation. Therefore, the resolution needs to be widely adopted by member states and should be implemented over other sanctions regimes and counter-terrorism measures to create a safer humanitarian space.

Keywords: Resolution 2664, Humanitarian Carve-Outs, Sanctions Regime, UNSC Resolution, Humanitarian Exemptions, Efficacy Analysis

On 09 December 2022, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2664. The Security Council, through the resolution, provides a “humanitarian carve-out or a standing humanitarian exemption to the asset freeze measures imposed by United Nations sanctions regimes” (United Nations, 2022).

Before exploring the resolution further, it is necessary to present a brief background of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United Nations sanctions regime. The UNSC was established with the primary intention of maintaining peace and security in the international system. For the same, they take steps such as initiating peaceful dispute settlement or making recommendations for terms of settlement. In some extreme cases, the UNSC resorts to employing peacekeeping forces or even imposing sanctions to restore order and peace in the system (United Nations, n.d.-b). However, before resorting to the use of force, under Chapter VII Article 41 of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council is tasked with solving issues by means of “complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations” (United Nations, n.d.-a). Following this article, the UNSC has historically imposed around 31 sanction regimes, of which 15 sanctions are currently ongoing (United Nations, 2023).

A regime can be described as a “collection of sanctions means put in place for a particular set of purposes” (*U.K. Sanctions Regimes*, 2020). The sanctions can be either thematic, relating to a particular problem such as nuclear proliferation, or geographic, relating to a particular country. Whatever the nature, the objective of these sanctions regimes have been to influence governments, groups, or individuals to alter their behavior to establish peace and order in the international system.

The sanctions regime by the UNSC has faced numerous challenges, such as sanctions evasion, weak measures, and futile pursuit. But most importantly, it has a human cost associated with it. The sanctions make it extremely difficult for humanitarian aid to be delivered to the people in need residing under the rule of the sanctioned entity or state.

Against this backdrop, the UNSC adopted the resolution 2664 to allow for humanitarian assistance even under a sanction regime. The resolution provides that “any financial transactions or provision of goods and services necessary for humanitarian assistance and basic human needs are permitted and not a violation of the asset freeze measures” (Fink & Sarfati, 2022). This is understood as a humanitarian carve-out applicable even to the Islamic State of Iraq and the

Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Qaida regimes to facilitate effective and timely conduct of humanitarian activities.

Research Question

As mentioned, resolution 2664 was brought into action to compensate for the humanitarian shortcomings of the sanctions regime. Given that more than a year has passed since adopting the resolution, my research aims to ‘examine the efficacy of the humanitarian carve-outs to the asset freeze measures imposed by United Nations sanctions regimes.’

The efficacy of the resolution will be examined through two aspects:

1. How has the resolution changed the access to humanitarian aid?
2. Has the passing of the resolution affected the delivery of humanitarian aid on ground/in real-time?

The former question presents the challenges faced by the sanctions regime before the resolution and thereafter explores how the resolution has changed the transfer and receipt of humanitarian aid. In simpler words, the research studies how humanitarian aid reaches target groups under the sanctions regime before and after resolution 2664 came into place.

More often than not, policies made from a position of power are not translated into work on ground. This problem is tackled by the latter question, which examines if the resolution has been implemented at a grassroots level. Additionally, I also present challenges, which arise in the practice of or due to the humanitarian carve-outs.

Importance of Research Question

Resolution 2664 has been hailed as a victory by the humanitarian community. The resolution came at a time when few believed such a resolution would be adopted, and fewer believed it would include counter-terrorism regimes (Fink & Sarfati, 2022). The resolution is also a counter to the long-existing problem of humanitarian activities under sanctions while also representing a changing global dynamic wherein the United States takes the lead to pen such a resolution.

The standing exemption is one step forward. However, there is a need to understand if it is a good step forward by resolving the challenges of humanitarian aid under sanctions. We also need to understand whether the victory on paper has indeed translated into victory on ground. An examination of both of these questions will raise the positives and negatives of resolution 2664, which can help guide improved humanitarian policies. This is especially important at this

beginning stage so that there can be better implementation for the true welfare of the target groups.

The paper first presents a literature review that provides a summary and critical assessment of existing literature on the sanctions regime and the humanitarian problems under the regime. Thereupon, the research design is discussed, followed by a presentation of my findings.

Literature Review

There is considerable literature discussing the difficulties associated with the sanctions regime. As briefly mentioned above, these range from implementation problems to humanitarian concerns. The literature available is on a country wise basis as discussed below.

Nishizawa et al. (2022) presents five of these challenges using the case of North Korea. First, they say that the implementation of sanctions is one of the biggest problems as it lies within the purview of individual nation-states. These states often do not have the resources to monitor logistics. This, in turn, increases the probability of entities illegally conducting trade with North Korea to gain financial benefits. Second, sanctions by individual states tend to be watered down due to other foreign policy considerations, such as gaining allies. Third, strict sanctions could have the inverse effect of further pushing the entity to pursue the sanctioned actions. In this case, tough sanctions on North Korea have led to Supreme Leader Kim Jung Un conducting more nuclear and missile testing as he views the sanctions as threats to his survival. Fourth, some believe that sanctions alone do not have the power to deter Pyongyang from pursuing nuclearization. According to UNSC reports, they already seemed to procure more than the imposed quota of petroleum barrels through China and other means. Fifth, sanctions impose a high cost on ordinary families in North Korea rather than the targeted elites. Because of the restrictions, international humanitarian aid is usually delayed or even suspended due to complicated customs and bureaucratic operations. This is especially troublesome since half of the North Korean population is malnourished and desperately needs help. Therefore, the authors present the complex difficulties of implementing sanctions while discussing humanitarian concerns.

Similarly, another report by the European Parliament highlights the impact of sanctions on the humanitarian situation through the case study of Syria. As the Syrian civil war continues for the 13th year, nearly 70% of the population requires humanitarian assistance (Leclerc, 2023). Like North Korea, Syria has also been one of the most heavily sanctioned nations in the world, which has caused unintended side effects on humanitarian operations. The European Union (E.U.) has implemented the UNSC sanctions on ISIL/Da'esh and Al-Qaeda as a measure of the fight against terrorism. These sanctions include restrictions on financial support for trade, a freeze on Syrian assets held in E.U. banks, sanctions on target individuals, and many more. However, the E.U. has

allowed for exemptions and derogations for humanitarian activities. Despite these measures, humanitarian actors face challenges such as widespread refusal of banks conducting transactions to Syria due to high legal and regulatory requirements. These refusals have caused difficulties in receiving aid funding wherein transactions are rejected or delayed, which in turn causes delay or cancelation in humanitarian actions. The complexity of the sanctions also, in general, discourages individuals or countries from carrying out legitimate transactions for fear of accidentally violating the sanctions. On the other hand, Leclerc (2023) also reports that the Syrian regime themselves “politicize and instrumentalize humanitarian aid by repeatedly obstructing, impeding and diverting assistance” (p.11). Therefore, the report presents both the difficulty in sending financial aid as well as receiving financial aid under the sanctions regime imposed by the UNSC and individual member states.

The argument posited by Leclerc on the politicization of humanitarian aid finds its roots in a CSIS report on ‘Rescuing Aid in Syria.’ The Assad government has, over time, turned aid into a political instrument to benefit themselves and their allies while punishing their adversaries (Hall, 2022). Then, the global assistance for the Syrian people has primarily just strengthened the Syrian government financially and politically, ensuring that millions of Syrians continue to suffer. The author presents that the international response to the Syrian crisis should be focused on four axes – taking informed actions, diplomacy and negotiations between donor and recipient governments, emphasis on greater resilience by the humanitarian community, and more robust facilitation of aid. Through this literature, it is clear that the difficulties in financial assistance within sanction regimes become even more complex with the involvement of sanctioned entities disrupting aid allocation.

The story continues in the case of Afghanistan as well. Even though there are no sanctions on Afghanistan as a state, Al Qaeda members have been punished using sanctions since the late 1990s. Since the Taliban now controls Afghanistan, many of these sanctioned individuals hold governmental roles. This has made financial assistance tricky. Like in other cases, financial institutes have been wary of transactions involving Afghan bank accounts, concerned about the repercussions they may face from the U.S. (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The Afghan Central Bank has also been cut off from international financial circles due to questionable credentials of bank officials. All of this has forced aid groups to use unsafe and expensive informal methods such as the *hawala* networks to transfer money into the country.

Specifically, in the case of Afghanistan, there is a gendered aspect as well. Since the Taliban has barred Afghan women from attending university or working in NGOs, there arises a humanitarian dilemma in the delivery of aid for women and children (Byrd, 2023). It is seen as socially unacceptable for a man to deliver aid to women. In the long term, the ban reduces the number of women available to work in humanitarian services. Both of these scholarly articles

present a complex socio-economic humanitarian problem under the sanction regime in Afghanistan.

In response to most financial difficulties explained by the literature above, the UNSC proposed Resolution 2664. This cross-cutting exception is a culmination of decades of discussion to find ways to avoid the adverse humanitarian impacts of sanctions. The shift toward such a resolution happened slowly by giving country-specific exceptions, such as exceptions in Afghanistan and Haiti (Gillard, 2022). The resolution clearly addresses the different ways in which funds or assets are permitted to reach the target groups who are under financial sanction by the UNSC. These rules can help mitigate the de-risking behavior by financial entities (Crystal, 2023).

The humanitarian carve-outs have been described as a “huge victory for the humanitarian field” and mark a rare UNSC consensus (Crystal, 2023). Although it provides much-needed flexibility for humanitarian workers, the resolution will only be impactful if other nation-states change their policies to accommodate carve-outs. Finally, the resolution only accounts for asset freeze measures. However, a need arises to make humanitarian exceptions for other kinds of sanctions as well. The author provides a structured analysis of Resolution 2664 and puts forth the positives and the negatives of the policy, making it highly beneficial to my research.

This literature review dealt with select literature available on humanitarian actions under the sanctions regime and the views on resolution 2664. A common observation is that most literature focuses on specific aspects of humanitarian aid and does not offer a comprehensive picture of the same. There is also an absence of literature that analyzes the efficacy of the resolution through the viewpoints of both bettering access to aid and implementation on ground. The research at hand aims to bridge the gap and study the efficacy of humanitarian carve-outs.

Research Design

To answer the research question, I use the primary research methodology of qualitative semi-structured interviews. Since the resolution has only been in place for about a year, literature directly discussing its efficacy and implementation is limited. Therefore, qualitative interviews with aid practitioners and other subject matter experts working in the field of sanctions regime are necessary to understand the happenings on ground.

The questionnaire has been created with the aim of directly answering both the research sub-questions. Since the methodology is a semi-structured interview, the questions have also been made in an open-ended manner to encourage dialogue.

Additionally, I use the nonprobability sampling technique of convenience sampling coupled with snowball sampling. A convenience sampling can be described as one where the “primary criteria

for selecting cases are that they are easy to reach, convenient or readily available” (Lawrence, 2014, p.248). Gaining access to interview humanitarian scholars is a challenge. Therefore, I interview experts I can easily reach and then implement a snowball sampling wherein I further reach out to their contacts.

Lastly, these interviews have been verified by desktop research of project evaluations, open-source documents and databases, and existing literature on the topic. Secondary data from scholarly articles and research papers covering topics such as sanction regimes, humanitarian aid, and difficulties associated with humanitarian practices under sanctions have been crucial for my research. These are also widely available on open-source sites.

The following section of the paper first presents the findings from primary interviews. After that, the various nuances and problems associated with sanctions regimes are discussed, and an analysis of the resolution 2664 is presented.

Findings from Primary Research

Experts reiterate that the resolution has made delivering aid easier because it removes barriers (financial, legal, administrative etc.) that otherwise humanitarian workers had to spend time and energy resolving. These were resources that were not going into the actual action of giving aid itself but instead were just spent getting over technical issues. Functionally, it is one fewer hurdle to climb while doing transactions as financial institutions may now be more willing to process funds (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023). The passing of the resolution is also understood as a significant message to banks, policymakers, and other stakeholders of the United Nations’ commitment towards humanitarian activities.

However, on the flip side, it does not make giving aid easier. The resolution has only been adopted by a few member states, making transferring funds difficult (A. Hall, personal communication, January 25, 2024). The misalignment between national legislation and U.N. sanctions is prevalent. Even if the resolution is to be used, it could go against domestic counter-terrorism legislation, forcing the bank to follow the stricter norms, eroding the use of 2664 (L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami, personal communication, January 22, 2024). Therefore, even though the U.N. has brought in a change, it does not solve the issues with financial transactions worldwide. In general, it has been easier for the U.N. to impose sanctions and, therefore, legally obligate the member states to implement them rather than dialing back restrictions (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023). Similarly, it is also unclear whether the change at the U.N. level has been socialized into banks and other financial institutions (L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami, personal communication, January 22, 2024). Therefore, more time is needed for the resolution to be adopted at the domestic level for it to

create changes on the ground (A. Subramanian-Montgomery, personal communication, February 08, 2024).

At the institutional level, banks are careful in their transactions because they are naturally held liable for any breach of sanctions. This could damage their reputation and, in a more business sense, affects their profit margins (A. Hall, personal communication, January 25, 2024). One of the primary reasons banks are disincentivized to process humanitarian funds is the existence of multiple levels of sanctions. The humanitarian carve-outs only apply to U.N. sanctions and currently do not apply to the uni/multilateral sanctions of those nations who have not adopted the resolution into their legislation. Therefore, banks and other financial institutions need to examine if the fund transfer breaches various other unilateral and multilateral sanctions. Due to these requirements, banks are usually unwilling to take on the risk or even dedicate time to carefully navigate this complex web (L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

Interestingly, smaller humanitarian organizations also seem to experience the effects of resolution 2664 differently as opposed to the larger organizations. Larger humanitarian organizations are more aware of such resolutions and, with their established financial/legal teams, can use these carve-outs to transfer aid funds efficiently. However, smaller organizations tend to have more difficulties as they may not have the legal/financial resources to navigate the complex sanctions space (L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami, personal communication, January 22, 2024; A. Hall, personal communication, January 25, 2024; A. Subramanian-Montgomery, personal communication, February 08, 2024). It is seen that banks are also more willing to conduct financing for bigger, more reputed organizations than dedicating resources to conduct the due diligence for smaller humanitarian organizations (L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

Similarly, certain faith organizations, such as, in particular, Muslim faith organizations, also face trouble with accessing financial assistance. The prejudice and disinformation against them cause banks to not engage with the organizations to reduce associated or perceived risks (A. Hall, personal communication, January 25, 2024; A. Subramanian-Montgomery, personal communication, February 08, 2024).

On the other hand, an USAID official reports that they have not seen an increase in aid diversion after the resolution came into place (personal communication, February 23, 2024). However, in contrast to the reports, over time, one of the main concerns with humanitarian aid has been the problem of aid diversion, as discussed above in the case of Syria. With the humanitarian carve-out in place, one of the significant concerns became the misappropriation of funds. There has always been some spillage, some corruption, and some misappropriation of aid money, even in a universe with numerous restrictions. J. Kurtzer argues that the additional restrictions make it

more difficult for the aid to reach the target audience rather than solely stopping misappropriation (personal communication, December 28, 2023). With the lifting of restrictions, in this case, the implementation of resolution 2664, even if there is misappropriation, the funds that are supposed to reach the targeted audience are being processed more easily. For example, hypothetically, consider that before resolution 2664, 99% of the aid funds reached the target audience, and 1% were misappropriated. Now, even if some funds are being misappropriated, the majority of funds which reaches the target groups extremely efficiently makes the trade-off worthwhile (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023). Therefore, even if groups argue that resolution 2664 would lead to increased diversion, it can be understood as a necessary evil for the greater good – “the misappropriation will be insignificant compared to the overall gains” (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023).

L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami support the sentiment that aid diversion has always been a concern, but one cannot have a zero-risk approach (personal communication, January 22, 2024). One also needs to note that some governments who do not support the resolution can use aid diversion as a reason not to renew the resolution. Similar concerns are raised by A. Hall, who opines that one needs to note the difference between reality and the narratives about aid diversions that are propagated as a political campaign (personal communication, January 25, 2024). A. Subramanian-Montgomery additionally presents that we need to analyze the problem of politicisation of aid diversion in a data-driven and evidence-based manner, and the response should be proportionate to the actual happenings on ground, not political whims or false narratives (personal communication, February 08, 2024). Hence, there arises a need for governments and organizations to be transparent about their findings about the resolution to create a safer humanitarian space.

Considering the multiple problems related to sanctions regimes and resolution 2664, multi-stakeholder dialogues on financial access are being held to bring NGOs, government actors, and financial actors to the table to brainstorm solutions. Since it is a multifaceted problem, there will never be one solution; instead, it would take multiple solutions to address the issues faced by the humanitarian community (A. Hall, personal communication, January 25, 2024). The communication between the different stakeholders can make the process simple consistent and reduce the mismatch between different policies.

Analysis of Sanctions Regimes

As discussed till now, resolution 2664 provides a humanitarian carve out for all of the Security Council’s asset freeze measures. This carve-out will also apply to all new sanctions regimes put forth by the UNSC unless otherwise decided.

The UNSC proposed this resolution after years of multilateral policy debates concerning the conflicting relationship between humanitarian values and security concerns. Some of these difficulties are explored below to provide a baseline with which the efficacy of resolution 2664 can be assessed.

However, before delving into the detrimental effects of the sanctions regime, it is necessary to first understand asset freeze measures and the logic behind them. Like any other sanctions, financial sanctions are imposed on legal persons, governments, or other groups in order to regulate or end their perceived criminal behavior. This behavior can be described as a wide range of activities, from terrorism to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In this context, an asset freeze can be described as a “temporary restriction of the right of ownership of a natural or legal person in the context of the fight against terrorism or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” (*Financial Embargoes and Assets Freezing*, n.d.). This idea is directly supported by UNSC resolution 1373 (2001), which guides countries in freezing the funds and economic resources of entities participating in these criminal behaviors.

The targeted asset freeze measures are usually used to serve the purpose of “compelling state officials and influential elites to pressure their government to change its behavior” (Jermano, 2023). The efficiency of such an asset freeze measure is an interesting study.

On the one hand, the U.N. sanction system has been integral in promoting peace and security in the international system. It has stopped “the flow of arms into war zones and support governments and regions working towards peaceful transitions” (Msuya, 2023).

On the other hand, asset freeze measures have not always been effective. The same ineffectiveness can be highlighted using the example of the United States sanction of Russia. Since the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, the U.S. and its allies have “sanctioned more than 9,600 individuals including many Russian oligarchs, government officials, military officials and non-state regime proxies” (Jermano, 2023). These multilateral sanctions have “frozen or blocked assets worth over \$58 billion” (Jermano, 2023). However, these asset freeze measures do not seem to affect Russian President Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy decisions, including his determination to continue fighting the 2022 Ukraine war. Therefore, the logic that sanctioned individuals lobbying for policy change can lead to leaders changing their behavior is clearly not always a success.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, terrorism has been one of the primary concerns for nation-states. As a result, UNSC and its members have adopted measures to prevent and safeguard against terrorism. One of the primary ways in which the states have ensured security is to prevent designated terrorist groups from accessing resources that can be used for the pursuit of

terrorism (Hamsik & Almanza, 2021). These security measures have resulted in complex barriers to humanitarian actions, as explained below.

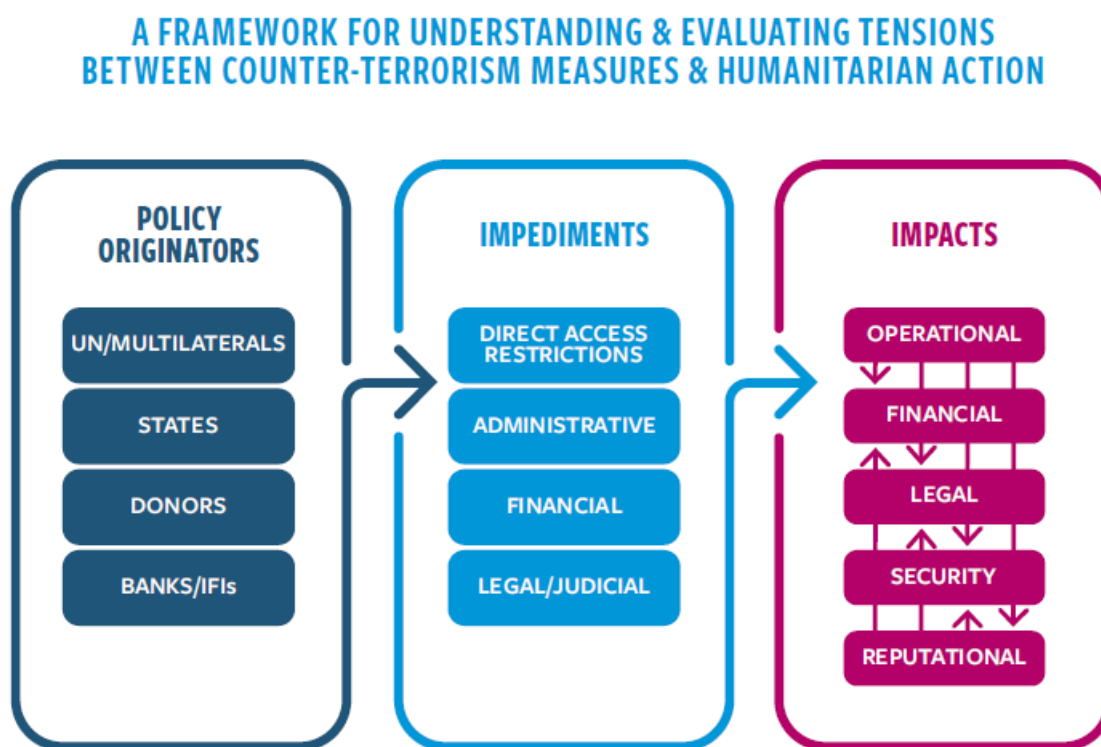


Figure 1: (Hamsik & Almanza, 2021)

The paper presents the actors at multiple levels – political or administrative – applying various counter-terrorism (C.T.) measures through multiple pathways or instruments such as sanctions and asset freeze measures. These impede humanitarian organizations in multiple ways, such as restricting direct access to resources or causing other legal or technical impediments. These restrictions, in turn, have impacts that are fivefold. First, it compromises the ability of humanitarian organizations to carry out timely and efficient work, directly affecting the beneficiaries. Second, CT measures impose additional and unexpected funding or other financial restrictions, making it difficult to sustain the program. Third, humanitarian workers and staff are at increased risk of facing legal action due to the heightened suspicions of supporting terrorist groups through the cover of their work. Fourth, humanitarian workers may also face physical or emotional harm due to the same suspicions. Fifth, if any aid organization comes under false scrutiny as part of C.T. measures, they may face reputational damages, which can affect funding and their relationship with beneficiaries on the ground.

Therefore, from the discussion, it is certain that sanctions have more disadvantages than advantages. Although it could potentially stop certain detrimental actions of actors, it has been

largely noted that asset freeze measures do not tend to be effective. It also had an added humanitarian cost, making sanctions in itself fruitless.

Analysis of Resolution 2664

Given the findings from the primary interviews, the discussion is taken forward by examining secondary literature available on the subject.

The Win

As mentioned above, the approval of resolution 2664 has been hailed as a victory by the humanitarian community. It has been reported that days after the UNSC passed the resolution, the impact has been seen on the ground. Just after adopting humanitarian carve-outs, “humanitarian operations were able to resume and scale up” (Msuya, 2023). Likewise, it has also directly allowed people living in dire conditions to access life-saving assistance (Spoljaric, 2023). The passing of the resolution has also been perceived as a message from the UNSC that no matter the political or security context, they will not prevent people from accessing humanitarian assistance. Before delving into the analysis of the resolution, it is essential to note that the resolution has only been around for a year, and therefore, the large-scale changes it promises would still require time to be implemented. Further, due to the interconnected nature of sanctions, it is difficult to attribute the positive or negative impacts solely to the humanitarian-carve out.

That being said, like the presentation from primary interviews, wanting to extend this victory, humanitarian workers have called on member states to extend these carve-outs to other counter-terrorism measures and increasingly implement resolution 2664 (Msuya, 2023). The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mirjana Spoljaric, also put forth similar improvements to extend the scope of the resolution. First, all states should, without further delay, fully implement the resolution. For the same, ICRC is extending technical assistance in implementation efforts. Second, the humanitarian exemption should be extended to other unilateral or multilateral sanctions following international humanitarian law as they have similar humanitarian consequences as general UN sanctions. Third, member states must demonstrate the same political enthusiasm to other areas of counter-terrorism regulations (Spoljaric, 2023).

Further, theoretically, the resolution can resolve the five main problems faced by humanitarian workers due to C.T. measures, as raised by Hamsik & Almanza (2021). As resolution 2664 provides humanitarian exceptions to asset freeze measures, aid workers and organizations are now less prone to suspiciousness regarding their perceived terrorist affiliations. This can save

them from reputational, legal, and security damages. This can then lead to continued financial assistance, allowing the aid workers to carry out their operations promptly and efficiently.

To explain further, reports suggest that the resolution has brought about more legal certainty, creating a comfortable environment for different stakeholders – humanitarian organizations, the private sector, member states, and donors – to function in sanctioned environments (Debarre, 2023). It has also created a conducive environment for open dialogue, as the stakeholders are now less worried about sharing information that can otherwise be interpreted as a breach of financial sanctions (Debarre, 2023). This legal freedom is also now slowly translating to freedom in the banking system. For instance, humanitarian organizations are finding it easier to transfer aid funds through formal banking systems for countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Debarre, 2023). This can largely be due to the reduced investigation by the banks after adopting the resolution (Debarre, 2023). There is also the fact that the resolution has made humanitarian work simpler (or maybe even legal) in places such as Yemen or North West Syria, where “financial transactions with listed entities cannot be avoided, such as the payment of utility taxes for offices, or income and social security taxes for staff” (Debarre, 2023).

The Challenges

Resolution 2664 has numerous positives, as discussed above. However, like the experts said, there are also a few challenges with its implementation and practice. For instance, as discussed during the primary interviews, the humanitarian carve out only applies to U.N. sanctions regimes. It does not apply to U.N. counter-terrorism resolutions or even other state or regional sanctions and counter-terrorism measures. Due to this restricted application, when humanitarian workers have to navigate numerous legal and policy measures, the legal risk and uncertainty associated with humanitarian work are not entirely eliminated (Debarre, 2023). Likewise, other restrictive clauses, such as those in donor agreements, continue to persist in the humanitarian space (Debarre, 2023).

Furthermore, even though the resolution facilitates the continuation of humanitarian activities, it can only fully function if it is entirely and properly implemented by the member states (Debarre, 2023). To date, only a few entities, such as the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, have adopted the carve-out into their domestic legislation. Spoljaric opines that since humanitarian carve-outs have yet to be fully implemented, the ICRC continues to face barriers. For instance, in some situations, the organization is unable to obtain parts to maintain critical infrastructure, such as water supply systems, because of sanction barriers. The problems of implementation also extend further.

To explain, the multiple steps in implementing an asset freeze measure need to be explored. First, a list of all persons and entities whose assets and financial resources are to be frozen is compiled.

Thereupon, member states ratify this list following their respective domestic procedure and apply it to the financial institutions governed by their law. Under the law of their member states, parent companies are also to ensure that the asset freeze measure is implemented across all their institutions and countries where they have a presence.

The member states then have to set up a monitoring system to screen customer databases and monitor transactions of receipts, funds, financial instruments, or other economic resources. This system is to be implemented to ensure that the customers or beneficiaries of the transactions are not subject to asset freeze measures (*Financial Embargoes and Assets Freezing*, n.d.). They are to detect all those resources that the sanctioned entity owns. Control or those that they have access to directly or indirectly. Concerns are attached to these monitoring systems, such as dealing with customers with identification data similar to sanctioned entities.

From the discussion above, it is clear that implementing and practicing asset freeze measures is a complicated process. The resolution 2664 provides humanitarian carve-outs for asset freeze measures. Now the question arises: how will these carve-outs be implemented technically? Theoretically, the member states and their financial institutions will now have to implement stricter monitoring systems to ensure that funds for humanitarian activities are indeed being used for such and do not, directly or indirectly, aid the activities of sanctioned entities.

Further, resolution 2664 promises to unravel the complex web of processes – supply chain administration, transfer of goods, financial services, and legal services – that humanitarian workers otherwise would have to navigate (Kapoor et al., 2023). However, given the difficulties in implementation discussed above, one has to wonder if the resolution will successfully simplify the ecosystem.

Recommendations

As mentioned by A. Hall, the sanctions space has multiple issues; therefore, resolving them would take multiple solutions (personal communication, January 25, 2024). The following sections present various recommendations for the resolution given by the experts and their analysis. A combination of these recommendations are necessary to attempt to solve the current issues caused by the sanctions regime and resolution 2664. It is important to note that these do not promise to resolve all issues caused by the regime but rather only aim to resolve the current issues discussed in this paper. Problems caused by the implementation or removal of restrictions are similar to wicked problems; therefore, a constant assessment of the conditions and solutions is necessary to have consistent improvement.

1. From the section on analyzing the sanctions regime, it is evident that sanctions have more disadvantages than advantages. They also have a glaring humanitarian

problem. Therefore, one of the main recommendations is to remove sanctions entirely. However, since this move may not be widely accepted and practical, the system should aim to keep a time limit for each sanction. After evaluation after each period, the sanction can be renewed to see whether the intended outcomes are achieved (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023). By such a move, if the sanctions prove ineffective, other measures can be taken without jeopardizing humanitarian work.

2. After the resolution, exchanging information via multi-stakeholder dialogue is critical to ensure transparency. Initially, banks were seldom in the room when these financial matters were discussed (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023). So, it is essential to get more representation in the stakeholder dialogues. These meetings can increase transparency between financial institutions, aid workers, governments, and other entities, which is essential for the resolution to be implemented and function efficiently (*Safeguarding Humanitarian Banking Channels*, 2023). This transparency is also important to keep issues such as aid diversion in check.
3. From the discussions on sanctions, it is clear that de-risking appetite exists due to misinformation about carve-outs or the absence of incentive to pursue various financial measures. To counter these numerous logistical issues, why not establish a humanitarian bank? (J. Kurtzer, personal communication, December 28, 2023). Like specialized banks like export-import banks, World Bank, and IMF, a humanitarian bank can concentrate solely on dealing with humanitarian aid and other financial requirements related to humanitarian work. These banks can understand the unique regulatory requirements of humanitarian work and hence solve the information and technical gap. A specialized bank of such a nature would also be able to provide equal support to all types of humanitarian organizations – large, small, and different faith organizations – without discrimination.
4. Finally, it is now essential for member states to increasingly adopt the resolution at the domestic legislation level to avoid the conflict between international resolution and domestic policy. They also need to extend their application to include other uni/multilateral sanctions regimes and counter-terrorism measures (*Safeguarding Humanitarian Action in U.N. Sanctions and Counter Terrorism Regimes: The Impact and Implementation of Resolution 2664*, 2023; Debarre, 2023). The resolution, including the aspects of the ISIL and Al Qaeda regimes, needs to be examined over time to understand the efficacy more deeply (L. van Broekhoven & S. Goswami, personal communication, January 22, 2024; A. Hall, personal communication, January 25, 2024). As with most resolutions, 2664 would need time to change the international humanitarian system drastically.

Conclusion

This paper aims to examine the practicality and implementation of resolution 2664. Experts reiterate that the resolution has been a good step forward as it reduces the complexities and widespread humanitarian issues with sanctions regimes. However, even though a year has passed, it has not made giving aid easier. Most member states have not adopted the resolution, so there is a conflict between the resolution and national counter-terrorism measures. The socialization of the resolution into banks and other financial institutions remains to be seen. From an institutional perspective, banks are disincentivized to conduct humanitarian transactions due to high risk, and to manage the same; they cater to larger humanitarian organizations rather than smaller ones. Aid diversion under resolution 2664 is also discussed with the conclusion that the gains outweigh the cost of misappropriation.

Analyzing the sanctions regime puts forth the fact that asset freeze measures may have a few benefits, but their disadvantages often overshadow them. Not only are they ineffective in achieving their mere aim of changing policy decisions, but they also cause immense humanitarian concerns.

The resolution is definitely a win in theory, as it allows humanitarian assistance to reach the target groups more efficiently. The resolution also brings legal certainty, which makes the system more secure for aid workers and reduces banks' de-risking approach. However, there are a few challenges that exist with the resolution. Like the primary interviews presented, many member states have not adopted the resolution, and it cannot be practiced as it conflicts with the existing domestic policies. The technicality of implementing the resolution at the bank level also remains in question.

For the problems discussed, four main recommendations are provided. One, there should be a constant examination of each sanctions regime to analyze if they have achieved their outcomes and to keep in check the humanitarian costs. Two, increased multi-stakeholder dialogue needs to be conducted to facilitate transparency between all concerned entities. Three, a humanitarian bank could be established to streamline humanitarian work and thereby develop an international institution with the expertise to resolve complex humanitarian financial issues. Finally, the member states should increasingly adopt the resolution and extend its application even to other counter-terrorism measures. Therefore, the analysis and recommendations presented by this seminar paper can then help guide improvements and better implementations of humanitarian policies.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews

This appendix consists of the questions asked to humanitarian scholars to gain more insights into how the passing of resolution 2664 has affected the delivery of humanitarian aid on ground/in real time

1. Has the resolution translated to practise in country operations yet? To what extent?
2. Have there been any difficulties such as say logistical issues with practising 2664?
3. How has the resolution changed access to humanitarian aid?
4. Has the resolution made giving aid easier?
5. Do you think financial institutions will still be sceptical about processing funds because there still exists the probability that these may end up in the wrong hands?
6. The resolution 2664 is understood to be applicable to ISIL and Al-Qaida regimes. Many entities are worried that this could have some negative effects. Could you throw some light on the same?
7. Who are the main actors affected by these sanctions, and the carve outs?
8. What improvements can you suggest to this resolution?

Statement of Adherence to Ethical Practices

This research has been conducted with the help of primary research – interviews of six subject matter experts. I have adhered to ethical practices and have gained necessary consent from the interviewees.

The Lamp of Expression – From Romanticism to TikTok

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When asked what poetry is, most people will revert to the Wordsworthian understanding of it as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings...its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity” (Wordsworth, 2003). This oft-quoted phrase forms the basic tenet of Romanticism – a shift from the idolatry of rationalism to imagination, emotion, and exuberance; from a kind of art where artists imitated nature in works of art, to one where they expressed themselves through creativity. Critics have agreed that modernism and industrialisation were “unfavourable to the spirit of poetry” and Romanticism was “the most dangerous form of anarchy – anarchy of the imagination” (qtd. in Kulik, n.d.). The only way for the poetic genius to survive in a mechanised world was by non-conformity and an outright revolution that sought to establish the aesthetic and literary philosophies of expressionism¹ and Romanticism.

Any socio-economic or political shift requires a cultural revolution of its own. Romanticism, at the turn of the 18th Century, was such a movement. Throughout history, there have been many such changes in aesthetic production, as recorded by art history and literary theory. Today, we stand at another critical moment of change. In the post-COVID era of the 21st century, we seem to be turning to social media and content creation as the new form of ‘Art’. Coming at the tail end of postmodernism, TikTok is often critiqued on the basis of shallowness, death of meaning, commodification of human self, breakdown of moral order, etc. In contrast, I believe that within the depthlessness that marks the production of all content, lies a strain of creativity and originality of human labour that is ineffaceable.

In a period of absolute global saturation of culture and economics, marked by a need for social distancing during the pandemic, the sphere of TikTok emerged as a convenient new platform for

¹ The Romantic idea of expression is often called the theory of expressionism but is different from the Expressionist movement of 20th century Modernism. It literally connotes the ideologues of expression, emotion, imagination and artistic genius.

art. An understanding of TikTok videos and Instagram reels, when approached through theories of expression and creativity, gives centrality to the position of the artistic mind, and their capacity for creation. This paper seeks to draw a relationship between the Romantic movement and the current production of social media content by understanding both as new philosophies of expression and creativity during tumultuous times. They both emerge as a need for artists to re-evaluate their social and creative positions. It provides a possibility of seeing TikTok (and, by extension, creative social media) as something other than simply a shallow and depthless space. Instead, it contains the possibility of some kinds of freedom in an increasingly panoptic world. This paper uses the dominant ideas of Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and of noted literary theorist M.H. Abrams, to establish the kernel of individual creativity that is central to Romanticism. When it comes to TikTok, due to a paucity of research material, I draw on my own exploration of the space, and its surrounding discourse, both on and off the platform.

The relationship between questions of Art, originality, and creativity, was theorised by the Romantics, and the best way to understand the cruciality of their work is through the metaphor of the mirror and the lamp that M.H. Abrams gives. The mirror is representative of the dominant ideas of Neoclassicism, like mimesis, catharsis, and *utile et dulce*. The job of the artist was to hold a mirror up to imitate and reflect society as it was. In contrast, Romanticism sees art no longer as simply a representation of nature but as “the overflow, utterance or projection of the thought and feelings of the poet” (Abrams, 1971). It emphasised the role of the human perception as an active entity, instead of one that passively received impressions from the outside world. The imagery of the lamp, then, symbolises an idea of art “which throws out images originating not in the world but in the poet” (Abrams, 1971). In Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*, for instance, the landscape itself becomes the human mind, and the movement of the river is connotative of the movement of the imaginative faculty. Traversing the terrains of primary and secondary imagination, the river comes from the depth of human consciousness, reaches a terminal point, and then retracts into its mysterious origins. This becomes one of the best examples of how the human is no longer the mirror, but the lamp – the creativity flows from the unconsciousness within. I, it is not mere mimesis. If the lamp (the artist) is the primary prime source of creation, inarguably, then, all kinds of creation must be given merit. On TikTok, all kinds of content are permissible, because literally everything becomes content. This ranges extends from concert clips, silly home pranks, behind-the-scenes, and makeup tutorials, to recordings of people doing regular normal household chores, videos of women in labour, and more. It is almost ridiculously impressive how content creators/influencers have the creative potential to record every minute of their lives and tweak it a little to turn it into content. Inarguably, the factor of profit is deeply prevalent here, as opposed to the more ‘pure’ Art of the Romantics. However, on TikTok, individuality becomes a critical selling factor. Artists transform their personality into a brand and hope that it is just the right amount of unique so as to hook the audience in. So, while one’s page might be about make up tutorials, they either take creative liberty with makeup and create stunning pieces of art with their face as the canvas, or they talk

about their life, their struggles, and pains while recording themselves doing makeup. A seemingly simple video on how to apply foundation or lipstick becomes a thing of beauty, of Art².

The mind then emerges as a repository of sensuous experiences, the key producer of creativity. Within this, imagination is given uninhabited stress as the key faculty for artistry. In Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, he establishes what later gives rise to the expressive theory of art. The subject matter of his poetry consisted of ordinary things and common incidents mixed with intense passion and coloured by imagination, which resulted in the ordinary common thing becoming unusual and, thus, artistic. Imagination emerges as an intermediary power that stands above both reason and sense as it connects them. It frees us from what Wordsworth calls the "tyranny" of sense, bringing us to the realisation that we are creative in our interaction with nature. Wordsworth's "Daffodils" was inspired by some flowers he saw once on a walk. Of the same incident, Dorothy Wordsworth's journal notes that the flowers were perfectly ordinary, even a little trampled and dirty (Durrant, 1962). If this instance is able to produce one of the greatest examples of literature in our times, why are Instagram reels and TikTok videos any different? In fact, due to the wide and extensive production of content, similarities and differences are found, communities are formed, and the world is brought closer together. Wordsworth wished everyone to recollect the daffodils he saw, or he himself wished to be able to remember Tintern Abbey as was, and social media does just that.

The question of originality, however, can be contentious vis-a-vis held as contention against social media production, since it is based mainly on trends or repetitions of same actions and sequences by all creators. While true, it also incorporates the public with the private, thus re-establishing the importance of the artist themselves. Even when users follow trends or use viral audios, their production is not an exact copy of the reels that came before it. For instance, in the spirit of social distancing, there was a dance challenge that was created and there have been studies that conclude that every single user who used the hashtag molded the dance routine according to their suitability, whether it was to do it in sweatpants, stay in frame after it's over, use special effects, etc. So, it provides a linkage between one's own existence, how the others perceive them, and how the audiences engage with the produced content. Romanticism, too, sought to do a similar thing when it took on the task of giving a private experience a public resonance. In the time of crisis, the literary productions of the Romantic poets were a call to the masses; a desperate plea to not forget their natural existence in the midst of so much machinery.

² There are many theories of Art, many of which would disapprove of understanding of such things as Art, but this paper is concerned with the theories of expression and Romanticism, and based on their ideologies and theorisations, conclusions are drawn about social media content. This is not to say that TikTok is Romantic, but to open up the possibility of applying the lens of Romanticism to reading such contents, instead of reducing it to only postmodern texts.

For Shelley, imagination is the greatest instrument of moral good. Poetry is produced by imagination and its relation to thoughts, with no referent in reality. The creativity of the poet comes from the fact that he is free to deviate from rules as he wishes. For instance, his poem *To a Skylark* does not speak of an actual bird, but an imagining of such a creature somewhere above him, with its song carrying pure unadulterated art. A radical way of reimagining the theories of art, social media allows one to do something similar. Currently, social media is taken by storm by the genocide in Gaza, and almost all influencers are talking about it. As a result of the convoluted laws of censorship today, Instagram is shadowbanning anyone who mentions these topics, or certain words directly. The way around it is impressively innovative. People will shoot dance tutorials, makeup videos, grwm (get ready with me) videos, and for every sentence they say about the political situation, they will follow with a fluff line about “how stunning is this blush” or “come with me to go grocery shopping” so that the algorithm doesn’t pick up on their connotative meaning. In a time when speech is heavily censored, social media becomes a primary platform for people to find radical ways of expression which doesn’t conform to hegemony. So then, like Shelley’s skylark, these videos do not exist as they are denoted, but exist through the connotations they carry and the depth of the meaning conceived by the audience.

A lot of topics that would have previously been unimaginable as public topics of discussions are becoming popular on TikTok. This is because the platform promotes the usage of humour as the primary method of making content. Every topic, from generic everyday content to distressing ones like depression, lack of disability rights, abuse, school shootings, and hardcore trauma, are being generated. If such difficult content is being produced, the easiest way to present it so as to not offend or trigger anyone is by humour. And it works wonderfully. There are communities building around topics and themes, and people find like-minded peoples, other trauma survivors, believers, etc., through engagement with various posts on social media. TikTok, for all its commercial agendas, seems to be living up to its ideal of democratising the public forum. This understanding of the working of TikTok is very similar to John Dewey’s theory of expression that he develops from Coleridge and Wordsworth’s idea of organic unity. He says that there is no spilling out of a creative potential that pre-existed as a complete entity within an artist. Artistic expression involves the progressive organisation of inner and outer material in organic connection with each other. Additionally, what Dewey does is take away Romanticism’s vertical movement of aesthetic experience which sought to culminate as a transcendental experience (especially in Blake or Coleridge), and makes it a radical philosophy of natural organicism which does not seek a ‘higher’ reality, but reinforces the Kantian as well as Cartesian dualism simultaneously as a way to stay grounded in reality (Granger, 2003). In this sense, the role of art is to reinforce an interaction between the self and the world, and the meaning that arises from that is a means of expanding one’s everyday horizon of knowledge, not transcend it. TikTok, in its constant reinforcement of lived reality and capturing of momentary content, does precisely that. It removes the ‘sacredness’ of art (which is why it is discarded as low art), and allows the discourse to take over its unity of meaning.

The argument for TikTok as art (not as a medium that facilitates art, but the medium becomes art itself through its perpetration and constant usage) under theories of expression and creativity stems from an understanding of it as a dynamic entity that reflects the cultural epoch of the age. If every generation has a *zeitgeist*, then TikTok is that of Gen-Z. It follows Hegelian understanding of the *zeitgeist* in the way it requires individual participation towards creating a cultural discourse and shaping the spirit collectively. It also brings together all kinds of ideas, often opposing, and creates a synthesis of shared cultural experiences. The main reason why this becomes such a dominant mode of creative expression is that it was extensively accessible during the most defining moments of our epoch – the COVID-19 pandemic, and the wars we are currently living through. TikTok becomes an expression of the current historical moment, and a repository of the cultural and social dynamics of our era.

As the expressive theory of art holds, the artist must free themselves from an oppressive state of hegemony by exploring and expressing emotions in some kind of language, be it words, images, notes, or, now, visual media. It is only through constant and forceful expression that the emotion takes a certain shape in consciousness. It is also important to note that until the end of creation (which in itself produces a positive feeling), the artist does not have a definitive idea of the end product. Their job is to emote, and stretch themselves beyond what is immediately and easily available to them. A lot of these ideas apply to creation of content on social media. Most artists generate a huge amount of content by recording what they feel and do in specific moments, and then later sift through the footage and piece them together to form a logical stream of consciousness. The process of reel creation seems extremely Romantic in nature; a mix of Wordsworth and Coleridge's ideals. If emotional experience is the marker of creative exploration, the premise of TikTok fulfills this in the influencers' endeavours to project an image of themselves as deeply passionate about certain things. The argument here is not to say that TikTok is Romantic in nature, because the main premise of Romanticism was a revolt against mechanisation, while technology is the very basis of social media. Instead, they both emerge as expressions of emotions and creativity in a very tumultuous time, as artistic endeavours seeking the expression of a new order. While Romanticism marked the beginning of the expressive theory in art, TikTok comes at the very end of it, in a time of alleged absolute stagnancy of meaning and expression. However, the argument for it as emotional, original, imaginative, and creative, presents it as a way to locate the human individual in the world, and make sense of the collective consciousnesses of man in a rapidly decaying cultural atmosphere.

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Queer Empathy, Liberal Activism and the Complexity of Sustainable Responsibility

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Ecocritique is similar to queer theory. In the name of all that we value in the idea of “nature,” it thoroughly examines how nature is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category. . . Far from remaining natural, ecocriticism must admit that it is contingent and queer (Morton 2007)

The discourse of intersectional identities and societal challenges has witnessed a transformation in modern environmental studies. Within the context of feminist and queer ethics, this commentary on Queer Empathy, Liberal Activism, and the Complexity of Sustainable Responsibility centres the interconnections between queer empathy and liberal advocacy within the framework of feminist ethics, vindicating an approach that encourages inclusive conceptions of interactions between humans and nature.

These dialogues that provide new perspectives on advocacy and responsibility toward one's environment seek to reposition the role of feminist ethics and environmental advocacy in the larger fight for civil rights and social and economic justice by elevating all bodies, homes, and habitats to an equal footing, regardless of their prominence in popular narratives, going beyond the limited emphasis on individual rights and highlights the intricate relationships between power, environmental action, and consciousness. A queer environmentalist approach, thus, emerges as a discourse that is centred on promoting ecological justice for socially marginalised groups of individuals that are disproportionately impacted and burdened with the responsibility of aiding the climate crisis. It opposes the dominant narratives in ecology that obscure the urgency of the environmental crisis and advocates for inclusivity in the present and power at the local and community levels.

Queer Empathy and Liberal Activism towards Environmental Issues

The intersections of queer empathy and liberal advocacy within the framework of feminist ethics have offered a potent perspective that holds an inclusive vision of human-nature interactions. This has generated a kind of politics that does not seek to divorce the natural environment from human communities (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). Drawing from the concept of Cultural Ecology conceptualised by Julian Steward in the 1950s, ideas in ecofeminism have developed to consider the environment as an integral part of our cultural identity rather than something separate from it. As articulated by contemporary academics Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, all bodies, homes, and environments, the seen and the unseen, are considered worthy of recognition and protection. This perspective thereby locates feminist ethics and environmental advocacy in the unequal struggle for civil rights and social and economic justice, which initiates a shift towards feminist ethics in social justice discourse and moves beyond the emphasis on individual rights to foreground the complexities of political economy and recognise the complexities of power dynamics and structural inequalities within societies (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). This approach, which integrates queer-feminist ethics and environmental advocacy, seeks to challenge the hegemonic concept of normalcy in mainstream environmental discourse and instead calls for community-level changes towards a just and equitable society, eschewing myopic economic solutions.

Kumud Sharma's work on Gender, Environment, and Structural Adjustment, underscores the inseparable links between queer and environmental advocacy and social justice, critiquing the dominant world order that enforces a unilinear idea of development and suppresses the diverse and unique responses that individuals have towards the preservation of various ecosystems. An important outcome of this type of world order, Sharma points out, is firstly, the lack of intersectional discourse of queer theory, ecocriticism, and sexual politics, and secondly, the prevalence of heterosexism in environmentalism, which often goes unnoticed and unchallenged (Sharma, 1994).

Pivoting our focus to a queer environmentalist approach, therefore, advocates for environmental justice for those individuals who experience heightened vulnerability by the climate crisis and challenges the futuristic approach that obscures the urgency of the disproportionate amounts of environmental hazards such as environmental illnesses, reproductive harms, and degraded homelands (Sharma, 1994; Di Chiro, 2010) that to which socially marginalised communities, including queer individuals, are subjected. The convergence of queer empathy, liberal advocacy, and feminist ethics presents an opportunity to reconceptualise environmental activism that is rooted in inclusivity and radical empathy.

The Responsibility of Sustainability: Who bears it?

The concept of sustainable development standardised by financial and governmental powers does not challenge the instruments in the hands of those with power. It only begs those who use

these instruments, the section of society that does not bear the direct brunt of environmental destruction, to be more careful in using them so as not to destroy our ecological system (Nypels 1993, as cited by Kumud Sharma Gender, Environment and Structural Adjustment, 1994).

Many action groups have emphasised the potential of the mobilisation of peasant and tribal women for environmental action. They are viewed as “day-to-day environmental managers” or as “barefoot conservationists” (Dankelman & Davidson, 1989). However, this perspective does not solve our problem of deciding who bears the responsibility because power structures are built such that decision-making does not happen on egalitarian grounds, and marginalised communities fall short of agency to remove themselves from difficult situations. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) notes, in the Brundtland Report (1987), that “Effective participation of people in decision-making is essential for achieving sustainable development.” This requires a political system that decentralises the management of resources, which are critical for the livelihoods of local communities (Sharma, 1994). Does the local power structure allow space for marginalised communities to reshape their lives together? Restructuring and reordering the power structure is necessary for this to happen, i.e., decentralising decision-making and management of resources and local planning based on local needs, skills, resources, and local implementation.

As much of the burden of being ‘caretakers’ and the ‘nurturing half’ falls on women, it is often assumed that responsibility for environmental protection, of taking care of sources that nourish and nurture, is exclusively theirs (Sharma, 1994). In Kumud Sharma’s writing on eco-feminism, we can see that feminist and environmental movements both call for a more egalitarian way of existence. Still, the dominion of some people over the environment and the dominion of some people over marginalised communities is only a parallel. That does not, in any way, entail that these communities are responsible for environmental protection. This instrumentalist perspective that views tribal communities and women as ‘environmental managers’ must not be taken without question and criticality in the specific context in which it is being said. In their paper, Sen and Grown (2013) said, “It should be remembered that they are neither responsible for the crisis in the world system nor can they be expected to resolve it.” This is not a way of shedding responsibility off of queer and minority communities but a way of placing more responsibility on the entities and processes that play a major role in causing the crisis.

Liberal Activism: Western Perspectives and Impacts of Consumerism

Western impositions have had a great influence on the worldview of sustainability, thus shaping both the history and the theoretical perspectives today. These impositions include the over-promotion of consumerism led economies, over-pushing technological solutions irrespective of local contexts, and over-imposing neoliberal policies that favour market efficiency over social equity. Such notions are problematic. For example, the overwhelming

focus on electric vehicles as a universal or the ultimate solution for carbon reduction overlooks the disparate capabilities and requirements in the context of developing nations, which may be under-resourced to ensure complete regulation and widespread adoption of electric vehicles (Rajper & Albrecht, 2020).

Western societies, being dominant players in global governance, decide what the “right” form and level of sustainability is and, in turn, determine whether or not other sustainability is even valid or acceptable (Guha, 2000). This frame makes the needs and situations of marginalised communities invisible to Western standards and unimportant to what actions should or could be taken. This means that environmental injustices persist since the experiences and vulnerabilities of queer people are often left out of mainstream narratives or discourses around sustainability. Furthermore, this is also exacerbated by the conditionalities that come with aid and development assistance, particularly in the economically struggling countries in the developing world, like Kenya and Bangladesh, which must grovel for essential assistance from the Western neoliberal donor nations and their agencies. Therefore, they have no alternative but to accept the Western worldview of sustainability (Fentahun, 2023). The Western understanding of sustainability generally promotes grand technology and markets to tackle environmental and externalities as a way forward not always in line with the immediate needs nor the lifestyles of local communities. This reflects the power relationships of the West on development terrain as a whole, according to the report *Sustainable Development Goals -Westernizing ‘Developing’ Countries*. It talks about the ironic weight of the Sustainable Development Goals, which immobilises the quality of other problems, and is more black and white than anything else in the anticipation of the Western allies and the United Nations in promoting it, ultimately undermining self-determination.

In addition, sustainability can also be exploited by corporations, primarily multinational corporations (MNCs) from developed countries, which use greenwashing as indicative of neocolonial economic structures (United Nations, 2024). Greenwashing offers a way for these MNCs to extract from the Global South in resources and labour, while at the same time projecting sustainability to Northern consumers. This maintains economic reliance and power imbalance between the North and the South. It also contributes to facilitating an epistemic hierarchy that restores Western knowledge as hegemonic while oppressing local knowledge, particularly in areas such as development, technology, and science (Roulleau-Berger, 2021). Western ways of knowing may favour abstract, empirically grounded scientific data and sustainable technological solutions. In contrast, local ways of knowing include community-based practices and a holistic mind to the environment. The hierarchy of Western knowledge over local knowledge perpetuates the dependency and disempowerment cycle.

To address these challenges, knowledge should be produced in a way that allows various ways of knowing, perspectives, and epistemological bases to be appreciated. Western and local knowledge must be regarded in the same way, and this will bring everyone one step closer to an

improved world. Aspects of inclusive sustainability come into play when policies and practices are designed with genuine input from diverse local communities. For example, resources in community forest management in Nepal, where local people are involved in decision-making processes adapted as participatory methods, have been proven successful in the conservation of the environment and, at the same time, have benefited local livelihoods (Shrestha, 2013).

Achieving inclusive sustainability requires genuine collaboration, a nuanced understanding of environmental issues, and the value of the autonomy of the local community. Authentic environments include amplifying the voices of those who are on the margins, recognizing the diversity within marginalised groups, deconstructing identity and environmental discourse, adapting practices that can dismantle structures that reinforce inequality or imbalance in power and practising radically emotional safeguards. These steps will drive long-term change rather than transient exploitation and enhance sustainability.

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Clashing Narratives of Kremlin & Kyiv: A Deep-dive Into the Russo-Ukrainian War

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On February 24, 2022, the European global and security architecture was shaken up when the Russian government under the present Russian President, Vladimir Putin launched a full-fledged invasion on Ukraine. It has been more than two years now, and the war, still ongoing to this day, has turned into a prolonged war of attrition (Hughes, 2023). This war has drastically changed the lives of millions of civilians and has led to the launch of unprecedented sanctions on the Russian economy, a refugee crisis and most importantly, shook-up the ties between major powers, the United States of America (US) and Russia (Neuman & Hurt, 2023). Thus, becoming a multi-faceted conflict with the potential for inflicting even greater disaster in the future.

Russia & Ukraine: A Tangled History

This ongoing conflict is a dramatic escalation of a conflict which started eight years ago with Russia's annexation of Crimea (Kablan, 2021). The relationship between Ukraine and Russia dates back to the 10th century. At that time, Kyiv was the heart of Kyivan Rus, the birthplace of both Ukraine and Russia. This shared history has led to the cultural closeness of these two nations which can be observed even today (Raj & Singh, 2023). However, at present, these nations are fighting against each other in the bloodiest war that Europe has ever seen since the end of World War II (Sawal et al., 2022).

The Mongol invasion in 1240 fragmented Kyivan Rus into present-day Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In the 14th century, Kyiv and its environs fell under the control of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. After this, Russia annexed Ukraine in 1783, making Crimea a constituent territory of the Russian empire, which remained part of Russia until it was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

in 1954. Before this, during the 19th century, the Russian Empire initiated a process of russification in Ukraine to bolster its control in Ukraine. However, Ukraine became a sovereign state in 1991 and gave away its nuclear arsenal to Russia by signing the Budapest Agreement in 1994 (Sawal et al., 2022). According to this agreement, the United States, Russia and Britain agreed to respect Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, existing borders and to refrain from threatening or using force against the country (Pifer, 2019). In spite of the agreement, the peaceful relations which Russia and Ukraine aimed to achieve were short-lived.

The roots of the current conflict can be traced back to 2004 Orange Revolution, which arose from allegations of electoral fraud favoring pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich. This led to the Ukrainian Supreme Court annulling the election and Viktor Yushchenko, a member of Our Ukraine- People's Self-Defense Bloc and known for his pro-market and monetarist views, became the winner after re-election. After Yushchenko became the President, Ukraine's pursuit of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership began. In 2013, the pro-Russian President Yanukovich, who had won the 2010 elections against Yulia Volodymyrivna Tymoshenko, refused to sign the EU Association Agreement and was ousted. After this, Russia annexed Crimea and portrayed support for separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk Nation Republics (DNR and LNR) of eastern Ukraine, areas populated predominantly by ethnic Russians (Raj & Singh, 2023). In response, NATO and the US increased their military presence in Eastern Europe, deploying battalions in 2016 and US tank brigades to Poland in 2017. In October 2018, Ukraine, the US and NATO conducted major air exercises, prompting Russia to hold its largest military drills since the Soviet era (Sawal et al., 2022). This history underscores the escalating tensions between the West and Russia over the years.

The Kremlin's Case: Justifying the Invasion of Ukraine

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin framed it as a "special military operation" aimed at protecting Ukrainians from alleged bullying and genocide. He claimed this military action was necessary to stop Ukrainian attacks on the breakaway regions of DNR and LNR, which Russia had earlier unilaterally recognized as independent states (Fisher, 2022). On these lines, Wade (2022) highlights that when the predominantly Russian-speaking and Russian orthodox populations in the eastern provinces of DNR and LNR voted for independence from Ukraine, the government in Kyiv initiated attacks on the people of these regions to suppress their resistance.

In order to gain as much public support as possible, Putin also portrayed the war as a preventive war with a strategic rationale in response to the attempts of NATO to gain a foothold in Ukraine. According to Putin, Ukraine was becoming a "springboard" for Western aggression and thus, the 2022 invasion was a pre-emptive strike to protect Russia's interests in Eastern Europe (Fisher, 2022). This was because during the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO allies agreed to give Ukraine NATO membership. Therefore, Putin's actions were motivated by his desire to ensure

Ukraine's neutrality. Putin justified his actions by asserting that the West deceived the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) by breaking promises regarding NATO's expansion made at the end of the Cold War. In his 2007 Munich Security Conference speech, he accused the West of violating verbal assurances by US President Reagan to USSR Secretary General Gorbachev in December 1988 that NATO would not expand into former East Germany if Russia accepted Germany's unification (Raza, 2023; National Security Archive, 2017). Putin claimed that he had attempted diplomatic solutions, but the West rejected his proposals, making the military operation a "last-ditch" effort to protect Russia from a potentially hostile military alliance. Meanwhile, demilitarization was another objective of Putin for his military action. The West had been arming Ukraine and training its military for a long time, this was perceived as an existential threat by the Russian government suggesting that Russia could come under attack by Ukraine's far-right government unless their influence was diminished (Rácz, 2023). Thus, according to Putin, demilitarization was necessary.

While laying out his reasons for launching the operation, Putin also illustrated that according to him, Russians and Ukrainians are "one people" who effectively occupy "the same historical and spiritual space" (Masters, 2023). He believed that Kyiv was the "mother of all Russian cities" (Putin, 2021) and thus, he felt that it was his responsibility to denazify Ukraine. While the previously mentioned reasons can be analyzed for validity, according to me, the necessity to denazify Ukraine was an implausible claim since Putin did not publicly elaborate/specify on the need for denazification. This rhetoric was created to demonstrate that Russia was fighting against evil but this was a factually wrong claim. Additionally, even though Putin had earlier signed the Budapest Memorandum, he declared that modern-day Ukraine was wholly created by Russia therefore, he doesn't consider Ukraine as a "real country" (Masters, 2023).

From Kyiv: Ukraine's Take on Russia's Invasion

Since 2014, Ukrainian citizens have faced partial occupation and annexation, culminating in a direct military assault in 2022. Even though for Russia this war is about achieving some goals, the Ukrainian narrative is that it is a fight for survival of their country, national identity and culture. President Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy, in a speech on the eve of the invasion, urged all Ukrainians to defend their homeland and called on Ukrainians abroad to return and help (BBC, 2022). Furthermore, Zelensky sought global solidarity, with him and his officials giving interviews to international media in the early days of the war, despite the risks to their personal safety.

The primary narrative in Ukraine is that Putin's actions are driven by a desire to expand Russia's territorial influence. This is because Ukraine, led by president Zelenskyy, perceives Putin as a "man with a mission," to secure his place in Russian history. This perspective aligns with Russia's historical resentment against the West (Hughes, 2023). Russia's annexation of Crimea

followed by failed attempts to integrate Ukraine into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) was interpreted as a strategic move to pave the way for Russian hegemony. For Ukraine, Russia's actions depicted a resemblance between Russia and the USSR, which also resorted to the use of force during the Cold War in states such as Czechoslovakia which pursued policies that were disapproved by Moscow. This portrays that the case made by Ukraine is that Russia is a declining power and Putin, having a revisionist mindset, wants to gain control over states which were under the USSR to re-establish itself as a great power (Berebon, 2023).

Michael Howard's quote, "War is the result of an illegitimate domestic system that aims to use war not for glory or survival but for feeding the corrupt system" (Berebon, 2023, p.95), encapsulates Ukraine's view on the war's causes. According to this perspective, authoritarian Russia feared that Ukraine's democratic influence could destabilize its regime, prompting Russia to attack Ukraine to safeguard against internal dissent (Berebon, 2023). Another reason, acknowledged by Ukraine, is that Russia perceived weakness in Western responses to its attacks in Georgia and Crimea, leading to the belief it could similarly attack democratic Ukraine (Samadashvili, 2022). This view also stems from the notion that Russia is an illiberal democracy and has expansionist tendencies.

US President Joe Biden, has framed this conflict as a fundamental ideological struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, using the defense of democratic values as a unifying narrative. This rhetoric has reinstated the United States' role in leading the "free world," resulting in significant American involvement since the war's inception (Ash et al., 2023). Along with the US, Ukraine has also received consistent backing from Western allies, notably NATO and the European Union (EU). They have provided extensive military, financial, technical, and humanitarian aid (Council of European Union, 2024). After framing the events in such a way, in response, the Ukrainian government declared martial law which even included possible bans on pro-Kremlin parties.

Decoding the Blame-Game: Examining the Reasons for the Breakout of the Russo-Ukrainian War

I adhere to the principle that no war is justifiable and no rationale can validate initiating war against another country. Therefore, Russia must be condemned for starting the Russo-Ukrainian war. A, in a war, not only do the contending parties face the horrors, but the entire world is also susceptible to its ripple effects. Additionally, Russia's occupation of a sovereign state contravenes international law and norms related to territory, borders, and warfare (Dodds et al., 2023). However, I don't see this conflict as a battle between might and right; it stems from both tangible material and intangible interests of Russia and Ukraine, making the responsibility for its outbreak shared. I also subscribe to the notion that although national security and power maximization are overarching goals for every state; domestic politics, perceptions and individual

leaders shape how states pursue these objectives. Therefore, states, in this case, Russia and Ukraine should not be treated like “black-boxes” i.e unitary rational actors (Mearsheimer, 2012).

I contend that the US also shares responsibility for the war’s outbreak. After the declaration of NATO expansions, the Kremlin proposed treaties to implement the Minsk peace accords, dissolve right-wing Ukrainian militias, and negotiate a new European security architecture, but the US refused to negotiate, rather it exacerbated the tensions. Mr. Burns, a career Senior Foreign Service Officer of the US, even warned that “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite, not just Putin” (Mearsheimer, 2022). Thus, I believe, the U.S. should have addressed Russia’s concerns to prevent the latent conflict from taking the form of a manifest conflict. Moreover, I believe the US’ actions indirectly encouraged Russia to invade Ukraine. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, justified as a “war on terrorism,” set a precedent for unilateral military action. The Iraq war, in particular, demonstrated that a country could invade another with impunity. The invasions launched by the US might have led President Putin to likely perceive rational grounds for invading Ukraine.

Furthermore, following the USSR’s collapse, Russia under President Vladimir Putin, became a major energy power, supplying a significant portion of Europe’s natural gas and crude oil. Putin saw an opportunity in this and integrated economic policy with geopolitical strategy. Notably after the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, Gazprom, Russia’s state controlled energy company, pressured Ukraine by cutting gas supplies. This move highlighted Ukraine can’t be depended on as a transit country and supported the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline, directly supplying gas to Germany and bypassing Ukraine. By 2020, Germany’s dependence on Russian gas had increased, and the completion of Nord Stream 2 in 2021 promised to further enhance this dependency, raising concerns about the loss of transit fees for Ukraine and Poland. The U.S. pressured against Nord Stream 2, fearing it would increase Russian influence in Europe. Finally, in response to Russia’s recognition of separatist regions of DNR and LNR in Ukraine, Germany, influenced by the West, halted Nord Stream 2’s certification in February, 2022. This suspension deprived Russia of a strategic asset, escalating tensions and contributing to its decision to invade Ukraine (Krishna, 2022). Therefore, the U.S.’s efforts to influence European energy policy were instrumental in shaping the geopolitical landscape that precipitated this conflict.

Another underlying reason for which the US provoked and participated in this war is because U.S. neo-conservatives saw the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as an opportunity to fuel a war benefiting American businesses. They argue that supporting Ukraine aligns with U.S. strategic interests and moral obligations while also being economically advantageous. Tom Fairless (2024) indicated that since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. defense industry has seen a surge in demand for weapons and munitions. This highlights a dual rationale behind U.S. support for the Ukraine war i.e geopolitical strategy and economic benefit.

The Russia-Ukraine war has also been fuelled by irresponsible leadership from Zelensky, Putin, and Biden. Putin's invasion of Ukraine violated the Budapest Memorandum, demonstrating significant irresponsibility. Meanwhile, Zelensky's unwavering hardline stance precludes any compromise that might end the conflict. Zelensky has organized peace summits without Russian participation, focusing on issues like nuclear safety, humanitarian aid, and food security and lacking substantive peace proposals (Sharma, 2024). Similarly, Putin's peace proposals are tailored to his own interests, rendering genuine peace unattainable. Therefore, it is imperative for both Zelensky and Putin to embrace diplomacy and engage in negotiations because the war might also lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. must also demonstrate responsibility by ceasing to promote democracy as the best form of government. The US often lectures other nations on governance, asserting the primacy of democracy. However, despite the apparent unity of the West, its global influence has not necessarily increased. This unity coincides with the rise of a post-Western world where other powers no longer follow Western directives. The West must adapt to a multipolar world, coexisting with hostile dictatorships like China and Russia, as well as independent powers like India and Turkey.

Conflict to Coexistence: Ending Hostilities in Ukraine

Wars are easier to start than finish, and their finales rarely follow a prescribed script (Walt, 2022). This statement is also true for the Russia-Ukraine war. This war has almost reached a stalemate with Ukraine's counteroffensive stalled due to inadequate Western resupply, while Russia managed to replace some combat losses and evade the full effects of sanctions. Given the situation, a ceasefire indicating a draw seems likely, which would be framed as a Russian victory and require NATO and Ukraine to negotiate a territorial settlement, bolstering Russia's status as a Great Power (Acuff & Clegg, 2024). However, this conflict underscores the need for conventional arms control for European security, as nuclear deterrence alone was insufficient to prevent this war. Therefore, to ensure future stability, confidence-building measures and arms control are crucial (Joachim, 2023). Efforts must also focus on achieving both negative and positive peace. Design thinking, with its dynamic, iterative approach, is well-suited for peacebuilding in this case. By engaging communities and fostering trust, design thinking can create sustainable solutions to conflict and violence, essential for achieving positive peace (Siragusa, 2023).

Conclusion

This commentary has traced the historical conflicts and interdependencies between Ukraine and Russia, detailing Putin's justifications for initiating the war and exploring the perspectives of

both nations. The analysis reveals that Russia, Ukraine, and the West share responsibility for the conflict. The commentary emphasizes the urgent need for diplomatic efforts and responsible leadership to end the hostilities and once the war concludes, sustained efforts must focus on establishing positive peace and ensuring long-term stability and reconciliation in the region.

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Book Review: Empires of the Sea: A Human History of the Indian Ocean World by Radhika Seshan

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India has always been described as being very rich. Rich in colours, diversity, spices, and wealth. This narrative is why India was as sought out as it was and why there were numerous voyages undertaken to find it. It is then ironic to suggest that India's history is not equally rich, but this is precisely what was done when the British colonised India. The infamous Macaulay Minutes and James Mill's texts on Indian history depict what the British could decipher from India's history based on what the Brahmins translated for them, and it is this history that defined the nation until historians set out to rectify it. India's history has been written and rewritten multiple times based on the reigning discourse that is popular amongst historians and the powerful. However, Radhika Seshan's work is not one of those, as it is not based

on belief, but rather, it is based on evidence. *Empires of the Sea* is a powerful work that brings to light an unexplored side of Indian history that was forgotten due to colonisation, which is our connections to the water that surrounds us, and to what lies on the other sides of those waters. This book is part of the budding collection of works that investigate India's maritime history, and it is the first to provide a wide look at the varied and long history, spanning from ancient times to the interactions during colonisation from a variety of connections, such as occupational, political, physical, economic, social, religious, cultural, and intellectual. The maritime perspective on India's history, where one looks at both water and land as relying on and extensions of one another, has largely been missing from common history curricula, and this book, with its accessible language and range of resources, is a step towards rectifying that.

In order to understand the multiplicities contained within maritime history, Seshan looks at maritime history from a variety of lenses. Her chapters have been divided based on key questions that are being asked at the beginning of each chapter, such as "How do we engage with the sea? Can one really engage with it outside of direct occupational links?" (ibid, p. 60), which are being answered within the chapter. The first and second chapters speak primarily about geographical factors and engagements with the sea, as it is these factors that enable people to transverse water

bodies. The third chapter talks about connections that have been formed with the sea outside of occupational links. The fourth chapter outlines the changes in the connections that occurred over time, while the fifth chapter talks about the beginnings of Europe's engagements with the Indian Ocean world. The sixth chapter is about how the Asians responded and interacted with the Europeans. These chapters guide the readers through the range of interactions people have had with the water bodies that surround them over time. The chapters are not chronologically ordered, yet the book maintains a flow as each perspective discussed naturally leads into the next.

The first perspective discussed in this book is the geographical one, for we cannot have a discussion about maritime connections without describing the geographical elements that enable them. History and geography are frequently viewed as two sides of the same phenomenon. History is the understanding of human experiences in time, whereas geography is the understanding of the space around us. People and spaces are constantly interacting with one another, and maritime spaces are not exempt from these interactions. Another perspective is the technological one, which enabled the ability to cross the seas and it shows the differences, similarities, and collaborative efforts undertaken by those who worked with the sea, as those who made the boats were not the ones who sailed on them. These boats depicted a portion of the body of knowledge on water bodies, as different bodies of water had different requirements, and the craftsmen had to adapt to these requirements, as well as to what materials were available at that time within a particular region. The examples listed within this book include, but are not limited to, "the dugout canoes of the Americas, the catermans of the eastern Indian Ocean, the dhows of the western Indian Ocean..." (ibid, p. 22). This body of knowledge exists within the literature of those who engaged with these water bodies, such as people in the southern tip of India, the Buddhists and the Jains, to name a few. This knowledge was in use for trade already, along the coast and for longer distances, and then became a tool for politics. Political bodies, such as the Cholas, used the knowledge of the trade routes to set up their empire. Similarly, Portuguese settlers controlled the flow of trade to grow their funds, and the English controlled the knowledge of the history of trade in the Indian Ocean world to show their own superiority. Knowledge became systematised over time, yet it remained largely unwritten, and therefore it was disregarded by colonial historiography, which valued the written word above all else.

This book has primarily been written from the perspective of maritime trade, and an understanding of this forms the basis for the entire work. Trade links regions, people, religions and state systems, and this is repeated throughout this work. It is well known that the Europeans looked to India to find riches, but it is less well known that India had an extensive trade network before that, with Indian cloth being used as a means of exchange for other goods. Trade networks are how the Europeans learned about Prester John, a fictional Christian king surrounded by wealth and barbarians who needed rescuing. Trade is how Buddhism spread to China and how

Jainism spread to Africa. Trade, as depicted within this book, forms the roots from which other connections branch out.

These connections have been extensively researched by Seshan, with proof being gathered from a variety of sources, such as inscriptions, coinage, literature, poetry, maps, letters, and sculptures. Halfway through the book are a few pages with images that illustrate Seshan's point. These images show tiles from the *Jor Bangla* temple in West Bengal that depicts, amongst other things, "a Portuguese convoy sailing up the Hugli River" (ibid, p. 124). This temple was created in 1655. Sangam poetry from the South of India speaks of the sea, and coins from the Satavahana dynasty (one which was located within the Deccan region from 2 BCE to 2 CE) have ships depicted on them (ibid, p. 13). These sources enrich the argument by showing us through the text and subtext of these sources that "knowledge was always available" (ibid, p. 46) in the Indian Ocean world. This challenges the prevalent beliefs that are held about the Indian Ocean world and the idea that it was disconnected from the rest of the world until the Europeans colonised it. There is also a series of pictures that show the inscriptions and carvings that Prof. Seshan speaks about, and the evidence is irrefutable as carvings of ships are present on a variety of different objects over a large span of time.

Despite the book's short length and the simple, flowing manner in which it is written, it is packed with information that has been delivered in a highly accessible way, which is uncommon in academic works. It accomplishes what it sets out to do by disproving colonial historiography and firmly establishing the age-old string of networks that surrounds bodies of water. The arguments repeatedly circle back to the book's main idea: maritime connections have always been an important part of Indian history.