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MPI and COVID-19

The recently published Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2020 by the United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative has jeopardised the advancement in the reduction of MPI due to the impact of COVID-19 on deprivation parameters. The projected figures in the report are disturbing, and this certainly requires early intervention in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2030. It is expected that an additional 490 million people will fall into multidimensional poverty within a period of 10 years in developing countries. Those countries that were on the right track in reducing multidimensional poverty before COVID-19 may not achieve the target as predicted. The situation projected in the report is shocking in countries in the sub-Saharan Africa.

The MPI report has cited two areas that have severely affected the deprivation indicators. These are nutrition and children's school attendance. An analysis of 70 countries shows that the pandemic has disrupted school education globally due to national and local lockdowns, where 91% of the children are out of their schools. It is anticipated that the school attendance of 50% of the primary school-age children in these countries will continue to be affected. Delay in food supply and implementation of food security schemes results in affecting the livelihoods of the poor. It is reported by the World Food Programme that about 130 million people across 55 countries face acute food /insecurity. The MPI report has pointed out that at least 25% of the people who were not undernourished before COVID-19 will become undernourished. This could be reduced only if food security is ensured to them sufficiently. Otherwise, the multiplier effect of such a situation will drag many people in the developing nations into the "poverty trap" shortly.

The MPI report that has combined the impact of attendance (50%) and nutrition (25%) reveals that the aggregate global MPI of 70 countries can change from 0.095 to 0.156 in 2020. This is almost equivalent to the value of the year 2011. So the impact of COVID-19 raises deprivations and sets poverty back by 9.1 years. Similarly, for school attendance, the total MPI of these countries could increase from 0.095 to 0.125 in 2020, equivalent to the value of 2015. This certainly increases the deprivations due to COVID-19 and takes poverty reduction back by 5.2 years, by adding 237 million people to multidimensional poverty in the coming years—a big policy challenge. The saddest part is about managing the 107 million multidimensionally poor, who are in the age 60 or above during the pandemic.

MPI for India is calculated as 0.123. About 27.9% of the total population includes the multidimensionally poor. The percentage of people susceptible to multidimensional poverty is 19.3%. The share of deprivation dimension to total multidimensional poverty in terms of health, education and standard of living is 31.9%, 23.4% and 44.8%, respectively. However, these figures need to be revised in the context of COVID-19, and a revised index has to be worked out in the days to come.

EPW Index

An author-title index for *EPW* has been prepared for the years from 1968 to 2012. The PDFs of the index have been uploaded, year-wise, on the *EPW* website. Visitors can download the index for all the years from the site. (The index for a few years is yet to be prepared and will be uploaded when ready.)

EPW would like to acknowledge the help of the staff of the library of the Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research, Mumbai in preparing the index under a project supported by the RD Tata Trust.

The impact of the pandemic will be severe on MPI. It is important at this stage to mobilise more resources and continue all supportive measures in terms of the public distribution system, regular immunisation programmes, safety network for the poor, etc, that may minimise the affect of deprivation indicators on MPI.

N Rajagopal
THIRUVARUR

The Sunderbans in Crisis

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a huge public health crisis throughout the globe. While imminent health concerns have naturally taken priority, the impact of certain other consequences of the pandemic is yet to be fully appreciated. One of these other consequences includes the unplanned migration of a mostly unorganised labour population in the developing world. To understand the consequences of such a migration on the lives of labourers and wildlife, let us look at the present situation in the Sundarbans in India.

The Sundarban Biosphere Reserve, India (9,630 sq km) is situated within the world's largest delta and is the only abode of mangrove tigers. About 4.6 million people live in the Sunderbans and their lives are intricately intertwined with the forests around them. Accordingly, being the largest contiguous mangrove patch in the world, the area has been heavily regulated by the Government of India for its conservation.

Traditionally, the livelihood of the residents of Sundarbans is dependent primarily on agriculture, fishing, tiger prawn production, seed collection, wood and honey collection, and ecotourism. Approximately 60% of the total productive population of the area is dependent on agriculture and 88% is dependent on fishing. There was a consistent increase in total agricultural land from 1990 to 2006 (16.9% to 20.93%) and ecotourism grew at 101% from 2003 to 2009. However, there was a sharp decline in these occupations in the following years due to rising sea levels and climate change.

The total agricultural land declined to 16.36% in 2013 due to rising sea levels and the supercyclone Aila 2009. Likewise, the residents who have been dependent on fishing for sustenance are finding it increasingly hard to catch fish due to the excessive saltwater intrusion in the inner delta and the overexploitation of common pool resources. This has resulted in a situation wherein 34% of all the people residing in 54 out of the 102 islands in the area are under life-threatening poverty.

All of this has resulted in the seasonal migration of men from the Sundarban area to other parts of India in search of better livelihood opportunities. At present, the situation has become so dire that one member from 75% of all families in the area is required to migrate and work in other parts of India to sustain their family.

Earlier this year in May, another supercyclone Amphan caused massive devastation throughout the Sundarbans amidst the COVID-19 lockdown. Officially, 28% of the Sundarban area had been damaged by the disaster and 1,200 sq km (out of the total 4,263 sq km) of forests had been destroyed. With seasonal labour migration halted due to the lockdown and the dropping rates of ecotourism, the socio-economically marginalised population has once again resorted to agriculture as their only means of sustenance. However, given the high levels of saltwater intrusion caused by the rising sea levels and the flooding of the Sundarbans by the cyclone, agriculture does not seem to be a viable option.

Accordingly, reduced income opportunities due to COVID-19, destruction of properties due to Amphan, and low productivity of agricultural land due to climate change have pushed the marginalised population of the Sundarbans to the brink of survival. The combined impact of these issues has forced the population to resort to illegal means to sustain a living.

Thus, there has been an increase in the illegal exploitation of mangrove resources and tiger poaching activities. While local relief efforts have temporarily managed the situation in the remote Sundarban islands, it may take decades for the islands and islanders to heal. The economic austerities brought about by the pandemic will further delay this recovery. There is a serious need to introduce alternative green-livelihood options for the marginalised and vulnerable populations of the Indian Sundarbans. Some of the possible livelihood options could be the introduction of grocery shops, development of local transport, pond re-excavation, organic farming, handicrafts works, small-scale aquaculture, poultry farming, and plantation of fruit-producing trees. These alternative livelihoods can replace community livelihoods like fishing, aquaculture, agriculture, ecotourism, non-timber forest product collection, etc, which have been adversely affected due to migration of labourers and poaching in conserved forest areas and the shrinking market due to lockdown.

With reduction in income sources, vulnerability from natural disasters, and the dangers posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the marginalised island communities can rely only on sporadic and uncertain relief efforts to conserve the largest delta in the world and the last abode of the charismatic mangrove tigers. It is imperative that the concerned state governments should pay heed to this issue and provide alternative means of sustenance for the people living in the Sunderbans.

Abhiroop Chowdhury, Raghuveer Nath, Armin Rosencranz
SONIPAT

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Kashmir after Article 370

The abrogation of Article 370, after a year, continues to elude democratic experience and aspirations.

India is a Union of States. This is a line that is familiar to most high-school civics students and is taken for granted. But, it has not always been a "happy" Union of States. Some states have more grievances than others on how they have been treated within the union, and none more so than the state of Jammu and Kashmir. With the abrogation of Article 370, it has even lost its statehood and its unity as a political entity, having been bifurcated into two union territories.

Article 370 had long been a bugbear of right-wing Hindutva nationalists resentful of India's only Muslim-majority state getting favourable terms under the Constitution. The argument was that Article 370 somehow stood in the way of the integration of the state with the rest of the union. This was a tenuous argument at best, since Article 370 had been diluted over the years by the union government through a variety of legal and extralegal moves. Never mind that Article 370 also formed the model for special provisions under the Constitution for multiple states from Andhra Pradesh to Sikkim, helping assuage local concerns for greater autonomy and keeping the union more united.

In the one year since the abrogation of Article 370, can we say that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are any more "integrated" with the rest of the union? The answer is an unequivocal no.

Even the parts of the state that initially celebrated the abrogation of Article 370, Jammu and Ladakh now seem to have developed second thoughts about the wisdom of the move. This has to do with the series of recent legislative changes that have taken place in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370, which has widened the definition of who is a "domicile" and made it easier for non-residents to acquire land in the state. There is a fear, not unfounded, that this could open the floodgates to completely change the demographics of the state as China has done with Tibet and is attempting to do in Xinjiang.

As for Kashmir itself, the region remains under lockdown with continued violence, seeing deaths among citizens, militants, and the armed forces on an almost daily basis. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic has surged, there has been little abatement in militant activity resulting in more casualties. The gains of the early part of the 2010s have been lost, and Kashmir once again threatens to slip into an endless cycle of bloodshed and violence.

Furthermore, the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir remains without any effective political institutions. It continues to be under Governor's rule, with no reasonable prospect of elections to the assembly any time soon. The Prime Minister's independence day speech promised elections to the Jammu and Kashmir assembly once the delimitation exercise in the union territory was carried out. With no date set for the end of the delimitation exercise (apart from a hazy one-year time frame), it is unlikely that Jammu and Kashmir will see free and fair elections to representative bodies any time soon. Even the promised panchayat elections, which were supposed to revitalise grassroots democracy, have not been held this year, having been postponed on the grounds of continuing militancy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The year-long detention of Kashmir's political leaders has meant that the voice of the citizens has been strangled further still. Detaining political leaders for fear of popular upsurge in their support unfortunately has a long history in India, and the present regime continues that inglorious trend. Even though a few prominent politicians have been released, others, however, continue to remain in a legal twilight zone.

What is, perhaps, the single biggest source of resentment over the manner in which Article 370 was removed was that it was done in a stealthy manner, putting the state under lockdown and using a dubious constitutional manoeuvre that bypassed the need for a properly debated and passed constitutional amendment. If the union truly intended to bring Kashmir into any national mainstream in a democratic and legitimate manner, why was it not done with the full approval of the people of Kashmir and with free debate over the wisdom of the move? If the abrogation, as is being claimed, truly benefits the people of the now union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, surely there would have been no difficulty in obtaining the approval of the people through their representatives and having assuaged all the concerns of the rest of Indian civil society on the implications of the move. That the union chose not to do so speaks volumes of the legitimacy of the move.

The Indian union is not held together by the force of arms or any commonality of religion, culture, or language. It was not forged out of "blood and iron" but through a common independence

struggle against a foreign oppressor, and for a liberal democratic republic, that respects diversity and protects the rights of its citizens. When the promise of democratic constitutionalism and federalism is undermined for narrow communal purposes, the strength of the union suffers. It grows imperceptibly less happy, not just in part, but as a whole.

On the Conundrum of Inequality

Every expansion of capitalist development underlies and renews new forms of inequality.

The birth of inequality coincided with the emergence of unequal division of resources and their private possession. From the egalitarian point of view, unnatural inequality is bad, unfair and unjust. But from the libertarian or conservative point of views, certain forms of inequality are desirable on the grounds that they lead to individual progress and economic growth. Such argument is based on the assumption that capabilities and individual qualities when unevenly distributed can lead to "progress," both for an individual and nation. From this viewpoint, even development of capacities and skill among the people would be considered as anarchic. Thus, absolute equality would count for anarchy.

In the liberal theory, there have been arguments recommending progressive minimisation of spheres of inequality. But what is significant is that in such theoretical arguments, the concept of equality plays an important role. Similarly, in such domains of inquiry, both the proposition and proposal to minimise inequality, which is internal to the liberal idea of equality, offer moral defence of various forms of inequalities that are enduring.

On the other side of the spectrum, however, in political arguments, it is such an enduring form of inequality that is expected to play an important role. But, those who are at the receiving end of inequality do not seem to summon inequality in their political arguments that are either absent or made on behalf of the former. This was evident in the long march of the city migrants, who were walking back to their homes almost silently; silence itself making a profound argument of protest. However, thanks to efforts made by some of the sensitive visual media, these images were brought into the public view.

The pains of the migrant workers go much beyond the patterned forms of inequality. Economic expansion based on accumulation of profit in actual sense presupposes an unequal access to resources. Such a process of accumulation generates not only enduring but also worsening forms of inequalities. Inequality with its enduring dynamic creates an intergenerational impact.

Inequality also gets transferred from one generation to another through social interaction. This happens through the monopolisation of scarce opportunities. Caste and community as the spheres of social interaction tend to maximise inequality through limiting and regulating the circulation of opportunities only within the caste/community groups. Such groups tend to create some degree of equality within the groups. But such a process does not happen in terms of underprivileged/marginalised caste groups. In such cases, inequalities get transferred from one generation to another. Sanitary workers, rag-pickers, generation upon generation are found in the same kind of degrading work. In such cases, inequalities continue to persist across generations and over whole careers. Educated and employed lower caste persons find it difficult to purchase a house in a decent locality. Inequality operates on the linear scale of values. Those who find themselves more equal to those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, find themselves lower than those who are above them. And the aspiration is to transcend the spheres of inequality. But this mobility is barricaded by caste, gender and race, to say the least.

It has become unfashionable to talk about structural inequality. Lower castes face both structural and ideological forms of inequalities.

In a certain sense, competition tends to produce inequalities that are considered to be reasonable. However, certain inequalities go beyond their competitive logic and produce not only physical pain but deep moral injuries. For example, educationally well-qualified Dalits are not only denied proportional justice as they do not get what they deserve but they also suffer from diminishing human worth. They are treated as if they are a part of dirt. Dirt is them and they are dirt. Since manual scavenging does not involve competition, it does not lead to value addition.

In the recent context of the pandemic, inequalities have acquired a worsening dimension as well. The city migrants, who continue to face several and severe forms of disparities, were further put through several hardships and moral pain. Their predicament went much beyond the usual forms of disparities that they endured while in the cities. Thanks to the ill-calculated decision of the government to impose a sudden lockdown, these migrant workers had to undergo unimaginable and inhuman hardships. The discriminatory treatment meted out to city migrants was too stark to require any elucidation.

As mentioned above, market expansion is based on the deceitful assumption that it takes care of every person who is aspiring to participate in active life with mobility. This is a kind of an abstract notion of equality. At the concrete level, a new technological intervention in the market tends to produce various forms of inequalities. The adverse experience of disparities has been acute in the field of digital technology. A need to access digital technologies created by the COVID-19-induced lockdown has brought forth the digital divide. The social basis of digital technology arguably is the middle class, while a vast number of people find it extremely difficult to access the digital technology. One finds this digital divide starkly present in the educational system. Thus, inequality performs the function to sustain the market-based equality.

The Idea of the Sacred Place

It has often been argued that there is a classical polarisation between the sacred and the secular. The sacred is basically defined in terms of religion and religion is further defined in terms of rituals. The unintended consequences of ritualised religion have been the emergence of political economy that mushrooms around the creation of every new sacred structure. But the material development that takes shape around such structures does not often get highlighted and is subsumed under the larger sphere of the sacred. However, the importance of material life around the sacred was highlighted by some public figures, with a particular reference to employment that many people lost as a result of the pandemic-driven closure of temples. Such concern underscores the connection between the material and the sacred.

However, this is not the only context that should bring under dispute the classical polarisation between the sacred and the secular. There is a historical context that tends to question the classical polarisation between two phenomena of the sacred and the secular. Such a context compels us to look for a middle ground that needs to be taken on board in order to offer a fresh conceptualisation of the sacred. The social history of the temple entry movement, both in pre-independence and post-independence India would enable us to attempt this conceptualisation. It could be argued that the immanent frame of the sacred offers space for transcendence of the self. The sacred was envisioned as the space promoting transcendence of the self along universal principles such as justice and equality. As the temple entry movement led by Mohandas Gandhi and Bhimrao Ambedkar shows, sacred structures or places of worship have provided the formative context for the articulation of such principles.

Among many spheres of human interaction such as the market, for Gandhi, temple is the most significant criterion or the standard to measure the degree of a person's detachment from the practices of untouchability or the attachment to social equality. As the social history of temple entry movements shows, the touchable castes' resistance to temple entry has been the most stubborn. According to Gandhi, such structures provided a strong specimen to assess the moral progress of society. Thus, for Gandhi, social equality is a grounding principle for temple entry.

Similarly, Ambedkar treated temple entry as an opportunity to articulate the principles of justice, equality and individual rights. This, in Ambedkar's strategy, was to assess how much the followers of untouchability practices care for such universal principles. However, unlike Gandhi, he considered temple entry as initial steps that on a positive side, were taken to measure the degree of upper-caste commitment to equality. On the critical side, it was also taken to measure the tenacity of negative consciousness entailing an element of untouchability among the touchable in India. Put differently, Ambedkar's temple entry was to force dialogue on those who found profit and social advantage in social discrimination. However, what was common in Gandhi and Ambedkar was that both of them put a premium on an open identification with physical visibility of the untouchables and their communion with the touchables in the sacred premises. It is for this reason that both the leaders were against the idea of separate temples for the untouchables.

One finds a similar thrust in the temple entry movement led by women in contemporary times. However, there is a difference between these two temple entry movements. Gandhi's and Ambedkar's reference points were egalitarian principles that were abstract but waiting for their inclusion in the Indian Constitution. Women's justificatory efforts for temple entry have categorical reference to those principles embodied in Indian constitutions.

Both Ambedkar's and Gandhi's ideas of temple entry and the mass mobilisation around it involved an attempt to write a transformative social history around the temple. Both of them saw in the sacred structures an opportunity to measure the ethical stamina and moral height of the caste-ridden Indian society. Both the thinkers sought to define moral height in terms of the robust commitment that they expected particularly from the upper caste towards the principle of justice and social equality. The most important aspect of the temple entry movement led by Gandhi and Ambedkar was not to limit the experience of equality to the temple but to take it beyond it and make it a part of everyday social interaction. Social equality mediated through the temples would get progressively absorbed in the social and civic life of the people. Equality as a regulatory principle was expected by both of them to permeate all the spheres of society; equality starting from the temple and reaching other spheres of society. They suggested a substantive association with the sacred, not symbolic. Gandhi and Ambedkar would not favour the rhetorical understanding of sacred structures that would accommodate the untouchables only at the symbolic level. Since the untouchables were symbolically accommodated in the *bhumipujan*, this has made it necessary to revisit the idea of the temple entry movement led by these thinkers.

Gopalpura

FROM 50 YEARS AGO

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY

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Plastic Performer

With the statements by Charan Singh and Kamlapati Tripathi, both issued on Wednesday by coincidence, the bickering between BKD and Congress (R), the two members of the ruling coalition in UP, has been carried to a new pitch of intensity. Till now the two top leaders had left the sniping to lower party functionaries. Evidently the UP Congress (R) leadership has decided that it has little to gain from the restraint it has hitherto observed, partly under pressure from the Prime Minister, towards the Chief Minister and his party. Last month's cabinet reshuffle which Charan Singh carried through without bothering to consult Congress (R) was a blow to the prestige of the latter, especially to that of Kamlapati Tripathi. More recently, carrying on in the same strain, the Chief Minister has taken important policy decisions, such as the promulgation of the preventive detention ordinance and the postponement of nationalisation of the sugar industry by a year, on his own. At the same time prospects of BKD merging with Congress (R) have receded farther than at any time since the formation of the coalition. In fact Charan Singh's latest statement should make it clear that merger is not on the cards any more.

RBI Moves to Shake Up Governance at Banks

T T RAM MOHAN

The Reserve Bank of India's discussion paper on "Governance in Commercial Banks in India" is refreshing in that it takes an approach to governance that is ownership-neutral. This shows a recognition that there are governance issues at private banks, not just at public sector banks. The significant proposal is distancing of four key functions at banks from the chief executive officer. The RBI may benefit from incorporating radical proposals made in other places such as the United Kingdom.

Corporate governance has been work-in-progress for some three decades now. The leisurely pace of improvement may be affordable at non-bank companies. Not so in the banking sector. The task of improving governance at banks has taken on a certain urgency after the upheavals caused by the global financial crisis of 2007.

The global crisis, as everybody knows, highlighted failures at banks on the part of boards of directors, the top management, the regulator and supervisor, lawmakers and the government. Numerous committees the world over have since proposed reforms in the banking sector, including governance reforms.

Nayak Committee

In India, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) appointed P J Nayak Committee came up with several proposals for governance reform in 2014. The committee focused mainly on public sector banks (PSBs). There seemed to be a presumption underlying the report that governance problems belong overwhelmingly to the public sector. The solution lay in moving towards the private bank model—with government ownership falling below 50%, freeing board and management appointments from government, adopting market-based compensation, etc. If we did not privatise PSBs, then mimicking the arrangements at private banks was the next best thing to do.

Alas, happenings in the banking sector since have raised doubts about the cosy assumptions of the Nayak Committee report. Governance at private sector banks has been found wanting in many respects. There has been at least one noisy chief executive officer (CEO) exit and one spectacular failure among private banks. Whatever the reasons for the superior performance of private banks—and even this can be established, perhaps, only after some more time has passed—better governance is not the differentiating factor.

Along comes a discussion paper by RBI (June 2020) on "Governance in Commercial Banks in India." The paper's approach is ownership-neutral: it makes no distinction in its broad approach between PSBs and private banks. Indeed, the principal recommendations of the paper leave us in no doubt that the issues of governance in banking cut across ownership categories.

The paper begins with a comprehensive statement of the responsibilities of the board of directors of a bank. These include basic functions such as the appointment of whole-time directors, the CEO and other senior management, monitoring their performance, determining their compensation and planning for succession.

We do know that in the case of PSBs, the board has little responsibility for the functions outlined above other than monitoring performance. Does the RBI intend to ensure that these functions hereafter vest with the board? Not at all. At the very outset, the paper makes it clear that the provisions will be applicable to PSBs

> except in so far as what is prescribed is not inconsistent with provisions of specific statutes applicable to them or in case where the major shareholder/promoter viz, Government of India retains its instructions.

In other words, dual control and regulation of PSBs—with the government and the RBI sharing responsibility—will continue.

This is unfortunate. The government, as the principal shareholder of PSBs, is entitled to a decisive say in the key functions of the boards of these banks. All that is expected is that it should exercise its say through its nominees on the board of PSBs instead of doing so from outside the board. The Banks Board Bureau makes recommendations for appointments of managing directors and directors of PSBs. The finance ministry takes the final call on these recommendations. Let these recommendations go to the concerned boards on which the government has its nominees. Then, we will be empowering the boards of PSBs, which must be the starting point

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of governance reform at PSBs. It would have been useful if the RBI had used the paper to strongly advocate such a course.

New Ideas

There are two ideas in the paper that break fresh ground. One is the idea of a term limit for CEOs and whole-time directors. The paper suggests that promoter-CEOs and whole-time directors have a term of 10 years. A management professional who is not a promoter may have a term of 15 years. Those who have completed 10 or 15 years at the time of the guidelines that will follow will be given two years in which to plan an orderly succession.

The proposal has evoked much debate. Many contend that it is for boards to decide the term of CEOs and whole-time directors, based on performance. Now, long tenures are not an issue at PSBs. The problem is quite the opposite—CEOs are around for too short a period to make an effective contribution. At private banks, however, tenures can be very long. For instance, the CEO of the largest private bank in India, who is due to depart, will have been at the helm for over a quarter of a century.

It makes little sense to say that the tenure of the CEO should be left to boards. It is the promoter who would have appointed all the other directors on the board. So, it is virtually impossible for a board to dislodge a promoter-CEO. Even dislodging a professional CEO is not easy, given the dynamics of private sector boards. Although nomination committees comprising independent directors appoint other independent directors, the CEO tends to have an important say in their selection and the overall composition of the board.

Unless a CEO's performance is disastrous or some other crisis has ensued, boards find it difficult to get CEOs to leave—for board members to make the suggestion is bad form. And yet leave they must, as it is difficult to sustain performance for long. In the United States, the average tenure of a CEO has fallen to 6.9 years from 8 years in 2016. The odd CEO who performs over a long period does not disprove the rule.

So, we do have a problem at private banks. There are costs to CEOs staying on for too long. And yet boards do not, in practice, find it easy to ask a CEO to leave. The suggestion to set term limits for the CEO must, therefore, be seen as addressing a market failure in the realm of CEO succession.

The second key idea in the paper is insulating key management functionaries—Chief Risk Officer (CRO), Chief Compliance Officer (CCO), Head of Internal Audit (HIA) and Chief of Internal Vigilance (CIV)—from the CEO. The Risk Management Committee of the board will have authority over the CRO and CCO. The Audit Committee will have authority over the HIA and CIV.

The RBI would like the selection, oversight, appraisal and removal of these four functionaries to vest with the respective committees of the board. Another key functionary, the company secretary, will report to the chairman of the board and his performance will be assessed by the nomination and remuneration committee of the board.

These proposals mean a considerable dilution in the office of the CEO of a bank. At last four senior persons in the bank would be functioning almost independently of the CEO. They also involve a considerable addition to the responsibilities of the board. The board will be assuming significant operational responsibilities in respect of four senior management functionaries.

How desirable are these changes? The RBI clearly thinks that these four key functions at a bank need to be distanced from the CEO if they are to be performed effectively. The CEO drives business. The CRO must ensure that the attendant risks are manageable. The CCO must ensure that the pursuit of business opportunities does not entail breach of laws and regulations and so on.

There is merit in the proposals. However, giving the CEO no role at all in respect of the four persons may not be the answer. The CEO cannot have the sense of being in charge when he has no authority over four senior management persons. The CEO-dominated board is indeed a serious problem. But the answer is not reducing the CEO to a cipher.

The RBI's proposals need some modification. Let the CEO make recommendations on the appointment and appraisal of these four persons. The board would have the authority to approve the CEO's recommendations. The removal of the four functionaries, however, should be the prerogative of the board.

The paper seems to go a little overboard in its effort to distance the CEO from risk management. It suggests, for instance, that the Risk Management Committee (RMC) of the board should have only non-executive directors. The CEO has an overall view of risks at a bank and so do other board-level full-time directors. In managing risk, independent directors on the RMC should not be deprived of the inputs of the bank's top management.

The paper is silent on remuneration of board members. If banks are to attract people with the necessary skills and commitment, they need to be suitably compensated. It is unrealistic to expect that competent persons would want to shoulder the enormous responsibilities that go with directorship on a bank at the compensation that PSBs now offer. The RBI must specify a minimum compensation for independent directors and the chairman of a bank.

The discussion paper has certainly thrown up radical ideas. The RBI might want to look at some offbeat ideas in other places. The report of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards in the United Kingdom (2013), for instance, threw up several bold ideas that the RBI might consider the following:

(i) The responsibilities of senior management persons may be spelt out in detail so that they can be held responsible for failures.

(ii) Banks above a certain size should be required to advertise the position of independent directors.

(iii) A senior independent director must review the performance of the chairman and explain it to the regulator.

(iv) Require banks to disclose in the annual report the range of measures used to determine executive remuneration.

Governance at banks needs a radical shake-up and this is quite independent of bank ownership. The RBI's willingness to go beyond the limited framework in which governance reforms have taken place so far is refreshing and welcome.

Clarifying the Rights of Daughters as Coparceners

ALOK PRASANNA KUMAR

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (HSAA), 2005, the last major amendment to the Hindu Code, attempts to undo the gender inequality built into much of Hindu personal law. It deems a Hindu daughter to be a coparcener—joint owner and interest holder—in the ancestral property of her father from the date of her birth.[1] This is an attempt to bring daughters at par with sons who, under Vedic law, become coparceners in their father's ancestral property as soon as they are born and could claim partition of their share in the ancestral property under the law.

The 2005 amendment was the culmination of a specific legal reform that began in the states, starting with Kerala in 1975, and by the time the HSAA was passed in Parliament, five states had made similar provisions giving daughters the same coparcenary rights as sons.[2] The HSAA extended this at the national level and also sought to make the change applicable with retrospective effect.

However, courts applied this law somewhat inconsistently. In *Prakash v Phulavati* (2016) the Supreme Court took the view that a daughter could not make any claims with respect to her father's ancestral property if the father had died without a will prior to 20 December 2004 (the date on which the HSAA was tabled as a bill in the Rajya Sabha), and therefore a suit for partition filed prior to the HSAA coming into effect would have to be decided in accordance with the pre-amendment law. In *Danamma @ Suman Surpur v Amar* (2018), however, the Court took the view that even if the suit for partition by a daughter is filed prior to 2005, it would have to be decided in accordance with the HSAA.

The three-judge bench in *Vineeta Sharma v Rakesh Sharma* (2020) was set up to resolve the contradictory interpretations of the Court in the Prakash and Danamma cases. In the Vineeta Sharma case, the Court has concluded that irrespective of the date on which the father died, with effect from 2005, daughters would be entitled to a share in the coparcenary property on the same footing as sons. In doing so, it overruled the finding in the Prakash case which had imposed a cut-off date of 20 December 2004 for daughters to claim coparcenary rights. The Danamma judgment, to the extent it had approved the Prakash judgment, was also overruled, but its major finding—that daughters would be coparceners irrespective of when their father died—was upheld.

Affecting as it does the rights of women across the country, this is no doubt an important judgment that needs to be examined closely to see how the Court arrives at this conclusion and what implications rest thereon. In this column, I intend to trace the history of the contradictions in the Supreme Court's judgments in the Prakash and Danamma cases and show how the Supreme Court in the Vineeta Sharma case arrived at the right conclusion. I argue that the Supreme Court's reasoning in the Vineeta Sharma case is based on a conservative understanding of the Hindu joint family and coparcenary property, but nonetheless one which leads it to a progressive outcome in the case. This, I argue, is somewhat similar to the approach adopted by Justice Kurien Joseph in the triple talaq case (*Shayara Bano v Union of India* 2017) holding that triple talaq was unlawful because it was un-Islamic.

Conflicting Decisions

The judgment of the Supreme Court in the Prakash case, delivered in 2016, arose in the context of the claims made by a daughter on the property of her father. The basis for concluding that the claims of the daughter could only be made post 2005 was the finding that the HSAA was not retrospective in nature. This was based on a narrow reading of Section 6 of the HSAA without going into the history or the context of the amendment, or even seriously analysing the scope of the section in the context of the notion of coparcenary under Hindu law (*Prakash v Phulavati* 2016: paras 17–18). Bizarrely, the judgment ends (paras 28–33) with a direction to register a public interest litigation to protect the interests of Muslim women under Islamic law!

In 2018, the Supreme Court had another occasion to interpret Section 6 of the HSAA in the Danamma case. This is where matters got more confusing. While agreeing with the conclusion of the Prakash case, the Supreme Court however arrived at the diametrically opposite conclusion on the facts of the case! Here, it held that a preliminary decree of partition (which occurred prior to 2005) cannot be deemed to be a partition of the property, disentitling a daughter from claiming a full share in her father's property on an equal footing with the son. While quoting five paragraphs from the Prakash judgment, the Court seems to have completely lost sight of the facts of the case on which the judgment was rendered (*Danamma @ Suman Surpur v Amar* 2018: para 22).

The conflict between the two judgments posed a conundrum for high courts which had to choose between two judgments of the Supreme Court of equal bench strength saying diametrically opposite things. To smooth over these contradictions, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court was set up with the Vineeta Sharma case as the lead case to address this issue.

Harmonious Interpretation

The judgment in the Vineeta Sharma case, authored by Justice Arun Mishra, identifies the key interpretational errors in the Prakash judgment. The most important finding is that the Prakash judgment misunderstood the concept of "coparcenary property," a core element

of Hindu succession law (*Vineeta Sharma v Rakesh Sharma* 2020: para 75). The concept of coparcenary ownership of property was, in the Prakash case, confused with the notion of survivorship.

According to the unamended Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, where there were no "Class I heirs," the share of any coparcener of property would go to the other "survivors" of the coparcenary property, that is, it would be divided among the remaining coparceners. The effect of the HSAA was to give women the same rights to coparcenary property as their brothers. The crucial element of this, which was missed out by the Court in the Prakash case, was that the right of coparcenary is always granted on birth and this position was not changed by the HSAA.

Moreover, as the Court in the Vineeta Sharma case points out, the Prakash judgment also did not note that the joint ownership of property by coparceners does not come to an end on the death of any one coparcener, but is reconstituted with the remaining coparceners; that is to say that the property does not stand automatically partitioned when one coparcener dies, but continues to be owned by the remaining coparceners with different shares.

The implication of this is that when the HSAA came into effect in 2005, what it did was to grant daughters a right in their father's ancestral property on the same level as the sons on the date of birth of such daughters. The natural effect of the HSAA was, therefore, retrospective. The consequence of such retrospective grant of rights (partition of property) could only be claimed by daughters from the date of the law being passed. This much was clear from Section 6(5) of the HSAA, which states that no partition which has already taken place prior to 20 December 2004 would be unsettled as a result of the HSAA.

What is perhaps mystifying is that the Court in the Danamma case arrives at exactly the same conclusion it eventually did in the Vineeta Sharma case, but somehow fails to notice all the errors in reasoning in the Prakash case. This has, however, been now corrected in the Vineeta Sharma judgment which has harmonised the Danamma judgment by upholding its conclusion and setting aside its incorrect reading of the Prakash judgment.

Conservative Interpretation, Progressive Outcomes

In restoring the original intent of the HSAA, the Court has not relied much on constitutional principles or the language of gender equality. Rather, the focus of the discussion in Vineeta Sharma case is on the concepts of the Hindu joint family and coparcenary ownership of property, and how they were misunderstood by the bench deciding the Prakash case. The HSAA did not attempt to do away with the notions of coparcenary property and the Hindu joint family (as Kerala had done in 1975), but had only reformed it with the intent of making women property owners on an equal footing with their brothers (Bose 2016).

Conservative approaches to reading statutes, especially in the field of personal law, need not necessarily lead to conservative outcomes. Another example of the same can be found in the line of reasoning adopted by Joseph in his concurring judgment in the triple talaq case (Viswanath 2018). The triple talaq case is an interesting one since two judges (then Chief Justice of India J S Khehar and Justice Abdul Nazeer) held that triple talaq was constitutionally valid, two judges (Justices Rohinton Nariman and U U Lalit) held it was unconstitutional for being "arbitrary" (Kumar 2017), whereas Joseph held it to be unconstitutional because it was un-Islamic. Joseph finds that the practice has no sanction under the Quran (relying upon the judgment in *Shamim Ara v State of UP* (2002) and, therefore, he contends it cannot form part of the Islamic personal law in India. In one part of the judgment he even goes on to say:

> When issues of such nature come to the forefront, the discourse often takes the form of pitting religion against other constitutional rights. I believe that a reconciliation between the same is possible, but the process of harmonizing different interests is within the powers of the legislature. (*Shayara Bano v Union of India* 2017: para 26)

Likewise, in the Vineeta Sharma case, the Supreme Court does not question the correctness of the Prakash judgment on the basis of its iniquitous outcome or the drawing of the arbitrary distinction between groups of women who are entitled to the benefits of the HSAA. Rather, the correctness of the finding in the Prakash judgment has been overturned on the basis of its wrong understanding of how coparcenary ownership of property works in accordance with Vedic Hindu law.

While the outcome in the Vineeta Sharma case is laudable, it is important to acknowledge that the larger task of reforming Hindu personal law remains to be undertaken (Mishra 2016). If the Supreme Court's approach to interpretation of the HSAA is any indication, it is likely that reform will be incremental and will try to accommodate the concerns of women within the traditional framework of Hindu law rather than any major reconsideration of what Hindu personal law ought to be.

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NOTES

1 Unless otherwise indicated, this column refers only to relationships among Hindus.

2 Arguably, this relates back to 1948 as well when the early draft of Ambedkar's Hindu Code sought to do away with the concept of the Hindu joint family (Venkatesan 2020).

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National Education Policy, 2020
Long on Rhetoric and Short on Substance

PRAVEEN JHA, POOJA PARVATI

The National Education Policy, approved by the union cabinet on 29 July 2020, is the third education policy document of the country, coming after a gap of 34 years since the last one. This article is a brief commentary on some of the relevant concerns around the question of provisioning for good quality universal education, equitable access to education, and the increasing push to wards privatisation.

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Given the universally acknowledged importance of good quality, universal education in the overall well-being of an economy and society, it is a truism that governments need to be committed and proactive in ensuring relevant, robust policy frameworks and their adequate provisioning. India has now got its new National Education Policy (NEP) after a gap of 34 years. This article engages with some crucial aspects of the NEP 2020, which merit urgent attention. In particular, our focus is around issues of universal and equitable access, public provisioning for education and the challenges of privatisation. The policy is finally in place after a lot of prevarication in the recent years; two previous drafts were submitted by two committees, namely the Subramanian Committee (May 2016) and the Kasturirangan Committee (May 2019). In an earlier article in this journal, we had highlighted some of the salient features of both these drafts (Jha and Parvati 2019).

At best, the NEP 2020 is a collection of some clearly stated measures, several feel-good intents, and a few broad-brush strokes of ideas underlying potential policies, along with selective sprinkling of a few logistical details. For instance, there are 22 fundamental principles outlined in the document (National Education Policy 2020: 5), which seem to traverse a dissonant canvas of ambitious wishes and fuzzy action plans. The absence of operational details is most glaring in the last section of the NEP, titled "Making it Happen," that deals with important "how to" questions of strengthening Central Advisory Board of Education, financing mechanisms and implementation plan. Before we engage with some of these concerns, we mention some of the welcome proposals in the NEP.

The policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy must develop amongst students a deep sense of respect towards fundamental duties and constitutional values; such clearly articulated salutation to the Constitution is timely and relevant. We welcome that the NEP reiterates the centrality of principles of universal access and equity as the cornerstones of previous education policies and aspires to advance towards achievement of these principles (p 4). To the limited extent that it recognises these as critical, it is a welcome step. The inclusion of the early childhood care and education (ECCE) of children in the 0–6 age group within the education system is laudable and has come about as a result of concerted advocacy by educationists and concerned social movements. However, the way forward is still not clearly articulated and merely suggesting that a special joint task force be formed to integrate ECCE into school education hardly addresses the conundrum of coordination amongst government agencies.[1]

The provision to allow for the medium of instruction until at least Class 5, but preferably till Class 8 and beyond, in the mother tongue/local language, wherever possible, and to be followed by both public and private schools is a step in the right direction. The constitution of a gender inclusion fund to "build nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students" is a welcome step. However, we remain sceptical about its intent and mechanics when we note that the fund is to be made

> available to States to implement priorities determined by the Central government critical for assisting female and transgender children in gaining access to education (such as the provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, etc). (section 6.8, p 26)

Whether it is going to be yet another tool to merely implement the union government's ad hoc decisions that may not resonate with the state-level realities is a question that remains unanswered. Another welcome step worth noting is

standardising Indian Sign Language (ISL) across the country, along with development of national and state curriculum materials. In this context, it is important to stress here that education falls within the concurrent list allowing both the states and the union government to legislate given the federal structure of governance. Introduction of proposals such as the three-language formula without adequate discussion in Parliament and with state governments goes against the principles of federalism. Further, the proposal to shift from the earlier 10+2+3 to the new structure seems to have been made in haste. Any alterations to the existing system should have been made after in-depth discussions with the state governments as well as with the wider citizenry.

The Idea of Indianness

These are some of the policy intents that seem broadly in the right direction and for reasons of space, we are not cataloguing here a few other promising features of the NEP 2020. For us, however, serious concerns far outweigh the aforementioned proposals. Again, for want of space, we briefly flag only a few of these here. In outlining its principles, the policy mentions "a rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions" (p 6). It is extremely important to unpack the idea of "being rooted in Indianness," which, at best, is ambiguous and, at worst, could degenerate into narrow-minded pursuits that Rabindranath Tagore was apprehensive about and cautioned us against 110 years ago in the visionary poem, "Where the mind is without fear." Such an apprehension has a strong basis given the experience of highly questionable interventions in curricula, functioning of educational institutions, and academic decision-making at large, which have generated lot of concerns.

It is worrisome that the NEP may, at its worst, be a nod to a deeply problematic ideological world view, wherein respect for sociocultural diversity of the country and the quest for inclusiveness may get marginalised. This is evident when we note suggestions, such as: children to "trace origins and sources of vocabularies from Sanskrit and other classical languages under the *Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat* initiative" (section 4.16, p 14); the emphasis on promoting "Sanskrit as a modern language offered at all levels of school and higher education, including as an option in the three-language formula" (section 22.15, p 55). Further, it seems strange to us that in spite of all the talk of constitutional values, secularism does not find any mention in the document, or for that matter, there is no engagement to locate education policy in the domain of fundamental rights. While it is important to educate students about fundamental duties, the complete omission of fundamental rights from the project of education is telling. We now focus our attention on three critical concerns as mentioned earlier.

Equitable Access to Education

The policy states that the gaps in education can be addressed by "undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system." It aims for "India to have an education system by 2040 that is second to none, with equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background" (p 3). A reading of the policy gives mixed signals as to how the critical challenges of equity and inclusion might be addressed. One of the proposals is to create special education zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts (section 6.6, p 25) in areas where there are large populations from educationally disadvantaged socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). Apart from the coinage of this new catchphrase, there are no details to explain its mechanics. What is also worth noting is that the NEP, in addressing the lag in participation and access by religious and linguistic minorities in school and higher education, makes no mention of minority institutions. The policy also seems to be geared towards creating newer schemes to address challenges faced by marginalised groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, and minorities (section 6.8, p 26). This is confusing given that recent efforts have been made to rationalise the number of existing centrally sponsored schemes in order to ostensibly implement them more effectively (GoI 2016). Instead, adequate financing and effective implementation of existing programmes would go a long way in bolstering equitable access for the most marginalised.

The policy aims to make changes to bring in an inclusive school curriculum. To cite from the NEP,

> the school curriculum will include, early on, material on human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity. It would also include more detailed knowledge of various cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc, to sensitize and develop respect for diversity. Any biases and stereotypes in school curriculum will be removed, and more material will be included that is relevant and relatable to all communities. (section 6.20, p 28)

It would be worthwhile to view how these lofty ideals translate into reality, even as recent development belie our expectations. Specifically within higher education, the policy aims

> to increase access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education; scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students. (section 9.3, p 34)

Instituting scholarships funded by private/philanthropic universities seems to be a tacit move to defund existing government schemes, such as the Postmatric Scholarship (PMS) for Scheduled Castes (SCs), PMS for Scheduled Tribes (STs), PMS for minorities, etc. This would prove disastrous for students belonging to SC, ST and minority communities as private-run schemes would be devoid of any safeguards, leaving students at the mercy of profiteers.

Disturbing also is the obsession to convert everything into online capsules and employ methods that cater to the online platforms. Discussions have noted how, in the times of COVID-19, students, when pushed to online schooling, find that the barriers that constrained their access earlier have only exacerbated and are compounded by infrastructural challenges of electricity and internet penetration (Jha and Ghatak 2020). The policy privileges online education in a seemingly

unmindful manner, which is indeed undesirable.[2] This does not bode well for furthering universal equitable access to education. There is also a clear and unapologetic push towards promoting voluntarism in the NEP, in the garb of peer tutoring to be taken up as a voluntary joyful activity and recruiting trained volunteers from the local community and beyond to participate in this large-scale mission (section 2.7, p 9). On the one hand, the policy pays lip service to the central role played by teachers in the education system, but then assumes that the important task undertaken by a well-trained, qualified teacher can be taken up by a volunteer. These proposals resonate what Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (2015) said that "India is the only country in the world which is trying to become a global economic power with an uneducated and unhealthy labour force."

Good Quality Universal Education

The promise to spend 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) towards education remains a promise even after 54 years; the NEP 2020 mentions this again but with considerable ambivalence. It states that "the centre and the states will work together to increase public investment in education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest" (section 26.2, p 61). Even as all policy directives come from the union government coupled with the fact that states are dependent on union government transfers as their revenue mobilisation options are limited, it is imprudent to affix equal responsibility on the states. The onus must be on the union government to make good on this long-standing promise. The policy also calls for increasing efficiency in using available budgets by suitable policy changes (section 26.5, p 61). Improper planning and design of schemes, rigid guidelines imposed by the union government determining how states spend their available budgets, budgetary bottlenecks at various stages of implementation, and inadequate provision for monitoring and oversight are some of the key factors inhibiting spending by states and leading to inefficient expenditures (Jha and Parvati 2014). That the policy makes no note of these critical factors reflects its limited engagement with this important aspect.

While the policy is cognisant of the role played by Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in the school education sector, there is no discussion on how it is to be taken forward and what is required to strengthen the legislation, which is riddled with flaws (Jha and Parvati 2010). Earlier, the RTE was diluted by subsuming Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) into the umbrella Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan under the garb of expanding and streamlining school education sector. Despite the fact that two decades ago the SSA was launched, and more than a decade now since RTE was enacted, barely 10% of schools in the country are RTE norm-compliant. This clearly reveals a need to strengthen the existing legislation rather than undoing all the work done thus far. As part of the enterprise to provision for universal education and in order to bring back into its fold the 3.22 crore children that are out of school in the age group of 6 to 17 (section 3.1, p 10), the policy sets itself out to "re-establish the credibility of government schools" (section 3.2, p 10). It is bewildering then that the policy observes that the requirements of schools be made less restrictive, making it easier for government and non-government philanthropic organisations to build schools and to allow alternative models of education (section 3.6, p 11). Watering down regulatory guidelines that are, as it is, almost non-existent is hardly the approach to re-establishing the credibility of any institution. Or is it the case that such dilutions are merely a facade for the third concern we flag, namely an unbridled push to wards privatisation in all its avatars?

Push to Wards Privatisation

A worrisome endorsement in the NEP is the push to wards private sector players to finance public education, at almost all levels: school, higher, technical, vocational, research and innovation. To cite from the NEP,

> substantial investment in a strong, vibrant public education system as well as the encouragement and facilitation of true philanthropic private and community participation. (Principles of the Policy, p 5)

> The Policy also calls for the rejuvenation, active promotion, and support for private philanthropic activity in the education sector. In particular, over and above the public budgetary support which would have been otherwise provided to them, any public institution can take initiatives towards raising private philanthropic funds to enhance educational experiences. (section 26.6, p 61)

The NEP thus makes large strides from its earlier versions that had favoured more timid, indirect routes to privatisation. Our concerns not only remain but are deepened by this unambiguous path to private sector promotion. This articulation finds resonance across the policy document along with newly devised mechanisms. With the stated intent to

> further enhance cooperation and positive synergy among schools, including between public and private schools, the twinning/pairing of one public school with one private school will be adopted across the country, so that such paired schools may meet/interact with each other, learn from each other, and also share resources, if possible. (section 7.10, p 30)

These proposed collaborations between underfunded public and profit-oriented private schools do not bring to mind any past precedents. Even more obfuscating is the expectation that they share resources. Are they to share their infrastructure or personnel, either of which would only imply further dilution of the public school system? The NEP opens up the higher education sector to foreign players apparently to encourage the top 100 global universities to open campuses in the country. The policy also mentions that it will explore opportunities for higher cost recovery without affecting the needy or deserving sections, particularly in the case of higher education institutions (HEIs). What this might lead to is a policy nod to manifestation of all kinds of student loans making it doubly difficult for students belonging to SEDGs to repay and thus perpetuate a vicious cycle of indebtedness, poverty and vulnerability.

Conclusions

There remain several other points of concern that we are unable to pursue presently. However, it is worth reminding ourselves of the Article 41 of the Constitution: "State shall, within limits of

its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing right to work, to education." Clearly, the founders of our Constitution were seized of the importance of public provisioning for basic goods, such as education, health, work, etc, very much in a rights framework. It is also worth recalling that the Karachi Declaration of 1931 had similarly stressed the importance of public goods in a rights framework unambiguously. The core question that arises with respect to NEP 2020 is: Are the policymakers reneging on the promise of education in a rights perspective as enshrined in our Constitution?

NOTES

1 In provisioning of ECCE, a truly transformative step would have been to formalise the cadre of Anganwadi Workers into the government system, as they continue to shoulder all the burden without adequate recompense currently.

2 A quick search of the NEP 2020 document reveals that the term "online" finds mention 48 times.

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ECONOMIC & POLITICAL WEEKLY

A Donkey's Wisdom

Can Literature Help Us Respond to the China–India Border Clash?

ADHIRA MANGALAGIRI

The recent clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers in the Galwan Valley has unleashed a new wave of anti-China sentiment and violent rhetoric in India. Can literature help us respond to the China–India border clash more ethically. Krishan Chander's 1964 novel *Ek Gadha Nefa Mein* (A Donkey in NEFA), based on the 1962 China–India border conflict, offers a way of denouncing the destruction of war without leaving unquestioned the inherently violent task of drawing and defending national borders.

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The June 2020 clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers in the Galwan Valley has unleashed a new wave of anti-China sentiment in India, adding fuel to the China-bashing already aflame during the current global pandemic. Amid calls to boycott all things Chinese and to stage "Sino satyagraha," responses to the conflict have once again brought virulent expressions of violent nationalism into the centrestage of public discourse. Perhaps, more disconcertingly, we have grown to accept such rhetoric as understandable responses to territorial disputes. Even for those of us inclined to conceive of nations as constructs and of borderlines as porous abstractions, the outbreak of military conflict brings into sharp focus the indispensability of national categories and the high cost of human life claimed by the labour of defending national borders. Territorial conflicts demand that we think in the vocabulary of violent nationalism, a language in which responding to the clash mandates more violence, as articulated in declarations of moral outrage and superiority, vehement calls to avenge India's dead, and rallying cries for exacting revenge upon China.

Can we strive to understand and respond to the China–India border clash differently, to still express our anger, mourn our losses, and denounce expansionism but in a language that does not leave unquestioned the inherently violent task of drawing and defending national borders? Apprehending the border clash through literature could provide one path to this end. And since comparisons between the events of June 2020 and the China–India border war of 1962 already abound, turning to the literature of 1962 could prove instructive. The bookworms among us need not look too far; the beloved writer Krishan Chander once again beckons us to reread his words in light of our present times.

Krishan Chander (1914–77), a giant in Urdu and Hindi literature and a stalwart of the Progressive Writers' Movement, penned a dizzyingly vast oeuvre of short stories, novels, essays, radio plays, and film scripts. Among his best-known stories are "Kalu Bhangi," a devastating critique of caste-based oppression, and "Annadata," which captures the tragic plight of peasants during the Bengal famine of 1943. Chander's stories and novels are marked by a seeming contradiction. On the one hand, his writings remain firmly anchored in the grounds of everyday reality and espouse a commitment to exposing the cruelties of society. Yet, at the same time, as he upholds the imperatives of social realism

and purposeful literature, his writings express a lyrical romanticism and an idealist preoccupation with ethical ways of being human. Chander's works seamlessly marry these contradictory pulls: exposing with brutal honesty the ugliness of present reality while celebrating the beauty of a humanist future yet to be achieved but imagined into being through the power of literature.

Chander was also a master humourist and satirist. These qualities come to the fore in his popular trilogy of novels on the adventures of a talking donkey navigating the human world of post-independence India. The first novel, published in Urdu in 1960 as *Ek Gadhe ki Sarguzasht* (The Chronicles of a Donkey), was later printed in Hindi as *Ek Gadhe ki Atmakatha* and translated into English as *Mr Ass Comes to Town*. With biting wit and farcical humour, the novel takes to task the dysfunction and hypocrisy of life in postcolonial India and the ineptitude of its bureaucracy and political structures. In a similar vein, *Ek Gadhe ki Vapasi* (A Donkey Returns) followed in 1962. The final novel in the trilogy—of particular relevance to us today, and yet the least read of the three—appeared in 1964 under the title *Ek Gadha Nefa Mein* (A Donkey in NEFA [North East Frontier Agency]). Based on the China–India border conflict of 1962, the novel confronts head-on the issue of China–India political tensions and the violence wrought upon those on the front lines.

A Donkey in NEFA

The novel opens with our donkey finding unlikely success in the film industry, first as a producer and then as a sought-after star. Chander's clever depiction of the behind-the-scenes scheming endemic to film-making no doubt drew upon his own experiences as a scriptwriter in the 1940s, first for W Z Ahmed's Shalimar Pictures in Pune and later for Bombay Talkies. Before long, the donkey receives an offer of astounding monetary proportions to join the cast of a movie (alongside Shashi Kapoor) to be filmed in NEFA, demarcating present-day Arunachal Pradesh, chosen for its scenic vistas dotted with Buddhist monasteries and pagodas. The reader travels, along with the donkey and the film crew, to the valleys of Tawang. There, Tawang comes alive under Chander's pen. He describes the landscape and the lives of the Monpa and Nyishi (then referred to as Dafla) peoples with journalistic precision. Through the donkey's eyes, Tawang—a place that immediately evokes the death and destruction of 1962 for most—takes shape not as the passive backdrop to the war but as a vibrant land, teeming with life. The donkey exclaims upon arriving in Tawang,

> in my view, the valleys of Tawang are the most beautiful of this area. The valleys were dotted with lush forests of Himalayan cedar and oak and the many colors of wild flowers, blossoming of their own accord. Waterfalls gushed seductively, deer frolicked in the forests. Truly, what heavenly joy.! (Chander 1967: 57)[1]

As in his other works, Chander's romantic descriptions of natural beauty serve not as an escape from reality, but as "a counterpoint to the unnaturalness" and depravity of human beings (Jalil 2017). Here, Chander's detailed descriptions of Tawang's land and people serve to concretise and bring to life a place that most often features in the popular imagination only as a point on a map of contested national territory. The donkey befriends a local youth named Maten, who leads the donkey—and the reader—through the inner caves and hidden paths of Tawang's forests, affording an intimate view of the place unavailable to outsiders. Tawang's natural beauty ominously portends the man-made violence and destruction to come.

Chinese soldiers appear in Tawang just as the film crew prepares to shoot the opening scene. As the large scale of the attack becomes clear, the crew evacuates the area via helicopter but the donkey gets left behind. The donkey, along with Maten and his beloved Yaming, hatch an elaborate plan to defeat the Chinese soldiers. The episode ends with the donkey's capture by the Chinese. In an attempt to save his life, the donkey tells his captors that he possesses an "atomic" secret—knowing full well that this would attract Chinese attention, given the Cold War arms race then underway—and demands an audience with Zhou Enlai. And so, the donkey arrives in Beijing.

Chapters 11 and 12 of the novel are set in Beijing and draw extensively from Chander's own experiences as a member of a film delegation that visited the city in October 1955 (*Renmin ribao* 1955). The reader catches glimpses of Beijing's geometric architecture and picturesque scenes of the former emperor's palaces. In 1955, Chander had travelled to China under the banner of *Hindi–Chini bhai-bhai*, the spirit of brotherhood that heralded an age of cultural diplomacy between China and India. Now, in the face of deteriorated China–India relations, the donkey travels to Beijing in an attempt to pose directly to Zhou Enlai those questions that weighed on the minds of Indians:

> At the time of signing the Panchsheel treaty, did you not know where the borders of India lie? … We could have set-up a joint commission to discuss the border issue, or … we could have turned to an international commission. Did you try at all to resolve the issue before turning to war? (Chander 1967: 118–20)

Zhou Enlai's responses prove far from satisfying; he mostly dodges the donkey's probing. Heated debate between the donkey and the fictionalised Chinese premier offer some catharsis for a readership demanding answers to precisely those questions that were bracketed away, and indeed, could not have been raised, during the *bhai-bhai* era.

National Violence

The donkey's visit to Beijing only further threatens his life as the Chinese decide to execute him. He manages to convince his captors to bring him back to Tawang and, with help from Maten and Yaming, narrowly escapes with his life. Yaming tragically dies during an attack on her village, and Maten and the donkey join a guerilla force of Indian soldiers waging what seems to be a losing battle against the Chinese. The novel culminates in the heavy exchange of gunfire that claims the lives of hundreds, both Indian and Chinese. In the concluding scene, the donkey returns to the battleground to retrieve Maten's body from among the dead. This final scene lies at the heart of Chander's critique of the atrocity of national violence:

> The valley was littered with the corpses of Indian and Chinese soldiers. The body of an

> Indian solider was lying on top of a Chinese solider. A Chinese soldier's face lay upon the chest of an Indian solider. An Indian soldier's hand lay upon the hand of a Chinese solider, as though the dead were clinging to each other, embracing each other, taking each other's hands, asleep upon each other, just like brothers. (Chander 1967: 190)

In this macabre scene, the brotherhood that the two nations failed to preserve comes into being through the corpses of those claimed by the nations' violence. War makes visible the senseless brutality of the task of drawing and defending national borders. The donkey's failure to broker peace with Zhou Enlai now makes sense; the language of national categories, of carving up the earth and arbitrarily assigning pieces of land national names, is doomed to fail. As long as we adhere to the logic of the nation state, we accept and invite its violence. Bringing us face to face with the ruthlessness and inhumanity of war, Chander urges us to think beyond the limits of the nation state.

The vision of a battleground strewn with the dead and debris of the nation's violence recalls a similar scene in Chander's earlier novel, *Gaddar* (Traitor 1960). The novel tells the story of partition from the eyes of a Hindu protagonist, Baijnath, a young businessman from Lahore. Riots drive Baijnath out of Lahore and he joins thousands of refugees on their perilous journey to the other side of the river Ravi, which now demarcates the newly drawn national borders of India and Pakistan. The novel closes with Baijnath returning to a scene of massacre, where a day earlier, he had pointed a spear at the chest of a Muslim man:

> Corpses were littered all around me: corpses of old men, young men, women, children: corpses that were face down, others that were lying on their back; and still others that were squatting. Some corpses were naked, others had their arms outstretched and stiff. Some others had their eyes shut. Some were holding a baby's milk bottle in their hand. These corpses seemed to have drained the poison of life to the dregs and now appeared to be asleep forever. (Chander 2017: 101)[2]

This scene of human depravity only makes clearer for Baijnath the utter madness of drawing national boundaries, imaginary lines capable of wreaking such devastation. He reflects,

> As I walked over those corpses, I seemed to be going over the many high grounds that my society has appropriated for itself … I see no difference between that side of the Ravi and this … I was reminded of that age that would come one day in the future … when there will be no India even when there is an India. And there will be no Iran, and no Afghanistan, no America, no Russia, no China and no Japan. (Chander 2017: 104–06)

Gaddar implores its reader to no longer remain satisfied with a world that treats national borders as a natural fact. The novel, like *Ek Gadha Nefa Mein*, exposes the sheer unnaturalness of the nation's borders, imposed artificially upon the intertwined fabrics of human existence. Like Baijnath, our donkey experiences a revelation as he roams the battleground in NEFA. Both Chinese and Indian soldiers have arrived to claim the bodies of their dead. The donkey finds Maten and begins to walk away carrying his friend on his back. Just then, a voice cries out, "Wait!" The donkey turns around to find a second donkey following him. "I am a Chinese donkey," the latter says, "my soldier loaded two corpses onto my back and walked ahead, thinking that his donkey will naturally follow behind him. But he forgets that I am capable of thinking for myself; I am a donkey who can understand, know, and recognise for himself." Where will you go now, the Chinese donkey asks. To a place where "all the world's borders meet" (*jahan saari duniya ki sarhaden aake milti hain*), our donkey responds (Chander 1967: 191–92). The novel ends with the promise that the donkeys will meet again someday, beyond this valley of corpses and on the other side of the horizon, in a place where all borders meet, and to which no one nation can lay claim.

Humanism beyond Borders

Amid the worst China–India violence since 1962, might we heed the donkey's call to think for ourselves, to think against the grain of public outcry that glorifies the nation's ability to enact violence? *Ek Gadha Nefa Mein* opens up another mode of response. Chander leaves no side uncriticised, no party unscrutinised. Through his donkey, Chander denounces China's expansionist ambitions, to the Chinese premier himself, no less. At the same time, his works remind us that India's borders are haunted by the specters of our own collective traumas, be it those of partition, or the ruthless internment of Chinese–Indian communities post 1962, or of economic and climate migrants and refugees. Chander challenges us to shift the terms of our outrage beyond national categories and to stand instead on the side of a humanism that knows no national borders.

NOTES

1 Translations of Chander's *Ek Gadha Nefa Mein* are mine. I have referred to the novel's 1967 Hindi edition.

2 Translations of Chander's *Ghaddar* are from Rakhshanda Jalil's 2017 translation of the novel.

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The 'Memory' of a Historian
Hari Shankar Vasudevan (1952–2020)

ANIMESH GUPTA

A scholar extraordinaire in the fields of Russian and European history, Hari Shankar Vasudevan had been associated, in and outside the subcontinent, with numerous academic institutions and research centres apart from the University of Calcutta where he taught for nearly four decades. One of his students reminisces about a great teacher, whose untimely demise on account of COVID-19 on 10 May 2020 meant a great loss to the world of humanities and social sciences.

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Despite being an apparently inappropriate student of HSV (as Hari Shankar Vasudevan was known to his students), I am making this attempt at writing something close to an obituary. I did not attend his European, or precisely Russian history classes or have done research on any given theme of global history under his erudite supervision. However, I still could consider myself, along with my classmates of master of arts programme in the Department of History, University of Calcutta during 2011–13, quite an exceptional (sometimes conceited too) pupil to witness him delivering lectures on modern and contemporary Indian history, an area of study he was relatively less known for. Leaving aside his expertise on Russian, European and global history, I was among those who, by the stroke of timing and fortune, got the opportunity to develop new understandings on an area of Indian history, that is, the intellectual origins and nature of planned economy in postcolonial times, on the basis of some fresh new perspectives from a scholar who happened to be an expert of non-Indian history.

I was attending the MA programme in history when Vasudevan had already spent over three decades in the department and was going for the last quarter, if his almost 40 long years of teaching career could be considered as a whole unit to count. Between August and December in 2012, he delivered a series of lectures that could have been compiled as lectures on the planned economy of India. This was a possible derivation from the fact that he simultaneously also took our Industrial Revolution classes, which he started with the references to the "Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England" delivered in 1883 by Arnold Toynbee. Involved with a handful of policymaking bodies of the union government. In retrospect, it has been a one-of-a-kind and unique experience to listening to him during the penultimate years of the Planning Commission when we did not foresee its dissolution.

The year 2011 witnessed a marked change in the syllabus of history at the postgraduate level in the University of Calcutta, with some of the newly introduced themes of historical studies and some modifications of the old and existing ones. Among the new ones was the addition of a paper titled "Contemporary History of India," which broadly addressed, at that time, the history of postcolonial India between 1947 and 1991 (until this change, teachings on postcolonial Indian history were confined to a discreetly separate study of India's foreign policies only). One among the old modifications was the split of European history into four different papers, addressing separately the histories of France, Germany, Britain and Russia roughly between late 19th and early 20th century. At this juncture, he was among the few who could become inevitable in handling both the themes of Indian and non-Indian history with his intrinsically conceived ease in "Europeanism" and his own understanding of governance and sociology of "Indianness."

Thus, the year 2012 was surely an exceptional time in the recent past of the university, when a Russian historian (as well as an expert policy advisor) was explaining how the Nehruvian consensus became a crucial factor in determining the future of development goals in a postcolonial India—a nation which did not until then overcome the status of "a nation in making." For some of us, who were very much hopeful about the historicity of postcolonial India and later opted for further study with a special interest in this relatively uncultivated terrain of historical research, Vasudevan gradually opened up new avenues to deal with the various sources in constructing the history of postcolonial India.

Casting aside the general readings like B R Tomlinson's *The Economy of Modern India, 1860–1970* (1993) or Bipan Chandra's *India since Independence* (2007), the three principle references he wanted us to mine for information as well as for new arguments included Bhabatosh Dutta's *Indian Economic Thought Twentieth Century Perspectives, 1900–1950* (1978),

Benjamin Zachariah's *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History, c 1930–1950* (2004) and Vivek Chibbar's *Locked in Place: Developmental Strategy and Late Industrialisation in India* (2003). In this way, an amateur's training in handling sources from various disciplines other than history in order to develop an interdisciplinary approach, especially in writing postcolonial Indian history, started, for one could notice the range of books he referred to covers the fields of development economics, comparative sociology, along with core historical studies (in case, the one by Zachariah serves) that could fit within a limited span of comprehension of a graduate student studying postcolonial history in an Indian university.

In spite of providing some of the ready references, the mainstay of his lectures (after a brief yet all-round covering of his subsequent discussion through a profound board work, for which he was popular and well-accepted by every student) revolved around the economic thoughts prevalent in Meiji Japan, early years of Soviet Union and the relevance of these thoughts in shaping the ideas of planned economy in India. Regarding the implementation and execution of these ideas, he used to highlight the contributions in this field by institutions like the National Planning Committee (or Planning Commission after independence), ideas like "Gandhian Socialism," "Bombay Plan" by Ardeshir Dalal and his associates, or "Peoples Plan" by M N Roy, and lastly by notable individuals like M Visveswaraiya, Nehru, Subhas Bose or in postcolonial times, by K N Raj, B R Shenoy, C N Vakil, R Balakrishnan, P C Mahalanobis and Bhabotosh Dutta himself. He said that the newly founded Delhi School of Economics (DSE) right after India's independence had a great deal of influence and providential impetus, so far as the task of contributing ideas to postcolonial Indian economic policies were concerned.

My personal stand on this opinion was further concretised when I went through two outstanding autobiographical accounts written in Bengali, namely *Aath Dasak*, or "Eight Decades," published in 1988, by Bhabotosh Dutta and *Bangalnama*, or "A Tale of an East Bengalee," published in 2007, by Tapan Raychaudhuri. The former was one of the most sought-after teachers in the Department of Economics in Presidency College, Calcutta and produced numerous students, among whom a few served in various policymaking bodies while pursuing teaching and research career in the DSE. The latter was an eminent (economics) historian associated with the faculty of DSE since the late 1950s and subsequently became the director in the late 1960s.

Regarding the study of Chibber in developmental economy in the framework of comparative sociology, Vasudevan seemed to be very hopeful about the future of historical research on postcolonial Indian economy along this line. For Chibber meticulously covered, under the comparative analytical framework between Indian and South Korean economy, almost all the major aspects of Indian economy and its relation to the nation–state binary. This included the real intentions of the industrialists conglomerated around the Bombay Plan and thereafter during the interim government or during the oligarchy (Vasudevan used this term to define Indian public administration between 1947 and 1951), the role of the state in industrialisation as well as mitigating the labour unrest right after the independence, or the possible reasons behind the government's failure in "installing a developmental state" in postcolonial India.

Vasudevan's appraisal of Chibber's comparative framework later became partially explanatory to me when he commenced his lectures on post-war Chinese economy along the lines of Pomeranzian "Great Divergence" in his Industrial Revolution classes during the closing months of our MA programme. On the other hand, the salience of Five Year Planning being "Nehruvian" was another dominant aspect of his way to explaining this theme, albeit he was never thoroughly uncritical of the Nehruvian benign state. Gleanings on Zachariah's *Developing India* (and later on, a part of his 2011 monograph *Playing the Nation Game: The Ambiguities of Indian Nationalism*) made me realise how a teacher–student relation could complement each other's understanding of a complex and multilayered themes like state-led economic development in 20th century India.

I heard him on two other occasions in the same venue, namely the Department of History, University of Calcutta. The first was when he was commenting further on Indian economic history and included a research student seminar under the MPhil programme in the summer of 2015. The first commentary was in the context of a presentation by one of the fellow researchers, who, during that cluster, was on his way to develop a thesis on the trends of economic history writing in Calcutta since the 1950s, with particular emphasis on the scholarly works of eminent historian Narendra Krishna Sinha. He was in his initial phase of researches, hence, yet to evolve an analytical framework to fit his study into a definite structure.

Importance of Memory

On this ground, Vasudevan's comments eventually turned out to be as great a push factor to give his dissertation a logical direction towards a lucrative end. The audience in that seminar were mostly students from the other universities, acquainted with Vasudevan's conventional command over non-Indian history. They listened in awe to his explanation of the factors like the accessibility of imperial documents in Indian archives to the young historians after India's independence, the intellectual endeavours in the Marxist and non-Marxist circles of Calcutta academia, the changing approaches towards the economic science vis-à-vis historical researches in different parts of the world, the reason behind N K Sinha's shift in interests from political history to economic history, the way Sinha influenced his pupil to pursue research on economic history could be considered crucial and later became the building blocks of the dissertation. The fellow researcher later acknowledged Vasudevan's presence as a source of consistent influence in writing his thesis. On that day, Vasudevan's observations, along with the task of providing a possible analytical framework on the basis of his own attachments with some of the stalwart Calcutta-based economic historians, made me realise the importance of "memory" in narrating and understanding history.

His understanding of economic history as well as his interest in various themes of Indian history, let alone his very own area of European and global history, provided a

greater impetus to numerous students working on Indian history in and outside the University of Calcutta. He had always been kind enough to guide the research students, not only, in particular, those who were already under his guidance officially, but, in general, those whom he thought he could supplement intellectually, even if their covered area was far from his area of interests (that also reminds me Vasudevan's formal engagement as a research supervisor on a project related to the print culture of "Renaissance Bengal" in the 19th century during that cluster of MPhil programme of 2014–15).

The second occasion was the felicitation of Binoy Bhusan Chaudhuri in January 2017, with the publication of a commemorative volume in his honour in the Alipore Campus of the University of Calcutta. This event was also graced by some of Vasudevan's own personal recollections and his understanding of Indian economic history that he developed in and around some of his finest former colleagues in the department over the course of time. There, I listened to him, narrating how he first arrived in Calcutta in the late 1970s and started to get acquainted with the intellectual traditions of the Bengali academia or academia predominantly influenced by the Bengali world view (of which Chaudhuri was a valuable part).

Other important aspects, he emphasised, were the socio-psychological facets of the Calcutta public life in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, and how the city intellectuals were trying to make their mark in various forms of *addas* and discussions during those days, sometimes even in a quite radical manner (the latter seemed to be a new and unique experience for him, especially after his arrival from the intellectual circles of Cambridge). Being nostalgic about those productive moments he spent with Chaudhuri in the form of debates and discussions on comparative analysis of agrarian economy and agrarian class structure in Tsarist Russia and colonial India, the audience listened to an expert of Russian history paying his tribute to an institution and individual of Indian economic history. To me, it was once again a reconfirmation of the inevitability of "memory" as well as of comparative analysis in developing a historical narrative.

On the level of virtual database in relative permanence, any intellectual layperson from any discipline could encounter the wit and insights that Vasudevan used to possess in the arena of Indian history by simply surfing the Calcutta Literary Meet webpage on YouTube. Among the top results is his participation in a panel discussion with one of the eminent South Asianist, Rudrangshu Mukherjee, right after the publication of *Nehru* by the latter in 2019 within the ambit of the Oxford India Short Introductions series. Keeping in mind the general inquisitiveness and relatively lower degree of command of an audience over academic discourses or debates in historical studies, Vasudevan appeared very humble in his attempt at elaborating and deepening Mukherjee's predilection that history also qualifies for a public discipline so far as the historical consciousness in everyday life is concerned, especially in the present age of social media through which the distortion of historical facts and interpretations have reached a very obnoxious level.

Under these circumstances, he engaged Mukherjee, in a very tranquil and explicitly eloquent manner, with various complex debates around themes like Nehru and nationalism in India, the position of present-day historians between the Cambridge and subaltern histories, Nehru's relative isolation from a majority within the Congress, the relation between Nehru and various marginalised sections of Indian society, especially the Dalits, and above all, India's partition and subsequent nation-building process in postcolonial times. This ensured that those intellectual laypersons sitting in front of them could actively participate in the discussion. The themes he addressed and made the author speak on during the panel once again attested his wide range of readings on Indian history from the perspective of a scholar, teacher and a policy advisor over the last four decades. In other words, it was no less interesting to listen to Vasudevan than Mukherjee on that occasion.

For the last one year, the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata was another institution (among others) where Vasudevan frequented. On 3 March 2020, the Consul General of Japan in Kolkata, Taga Masayuki, was the invited speaker at MAKAIAS for a talk on Japan and its economic ties with India, where Vasudevan remained present among other dignitaries. It happened to be his last visit to an institution, which, under his administrative authority as the director, had acquired the status of being a household name in social science circles throughout India during his tenure around 2007–11.

Last Visit

Following the Consul-General's speech, he was asked to share some of his thoughts and observations on India–Japan bilateral relation. What he delivered for the next 10 to 15 minutes was a blend of Indian history and foreign policy; historical perspective became evident while highlighting the long tie between Japan and India since the days of revolutionaries like Rashbehari Bose or Japan's educational and intellectual exchanges with Tagore's Shantiniketan; approaches of India's foreign policy prevailed while dealing with the structural changes of Indian economy, based on Japanese collaboration in post-liberalisation era. In the Q & A session, I drew the attention of the Consul-General to some of the unique features of East Asian industrialisation in the post-war era, along the argumentative line of Kenneth Pomeranz, another theme of history I learnt under Vasudevan in the winter of 2012–13. Before leaving, he said to me, "You've got a nice memory, man!"

On that day, I never thought I would have to cherish, after a couple of months, some "nice memor(ies)" around this man in order to pay a posthumous homage.

In the recent past, Vasudevan's further intervention into the domain of Indian history resulted into the publication of two critically acclaimed research articles, namely "Communism in India," compiled in *The Cambridge History of Communism: Part-II—Becoming Global, Becoming National* (2017) and "India and the October Revolution: Nationalist Revolutionaries, Bolshevik Power and Lord Curzon's Nightmare," compiled in *The Global Impact of Russia's Great War and Revolution, Book 2: The Wider Arc of Revolution, Part 2* (2019).

Alarmingly Simplified Data Gathering

VICKRAM CRISHNA

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Aadhaar Effect: Why the World's Largest Identity Project Matters by N S Ramnath and Charles Assisi, *Oxford University Press, 2018; pp 328, ₹350.*

Dissent on Aadhaar: Big Data Meets Big Brother edited by Reetika Khera, *Orient Blackswan, 2019; pp 288, ₹406.*

We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves by John Cheney-Lippold, *NYU Press, 2018; pp 268, $14.19.*

In 2009, without any public discussion, the Government of India issued an executive order setting up the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), creating it as an office under the Planning Commission. The first chairperson, Nandan Nilekani, until then chairperson of a private company, Infosys Ltd, was conferred the rank of a cabinet minister.

Given this status, he was able to quickly launch what was publicised as a portable identification system, claimed to provide India's first national digital identity for persons who were said to lack access to any documentation at all. This would, it was said, provide anytime access to guaranteed welfare benefits under a range of such schemes. Without this, it was said, the functioning of such schemes led to widespread "leakages," ensuring that vast amounts of moneys paid out by the state were not reaching the intended beneficiaries at all, and this would put an end to such problems.

In 2018, after a lengthy series of struggles in various courtrooms across the nation, the Supreme Court issued an omnibus order on a large number of individual public interest litigations, and against a series of appeals against repeated contempt of court by the government at various levels (both state and centre). The original executive order was, after seven years, replaced with legislation, but in the form of a money bill. This attracted further litigation against the manner of its passage into law, apart from numerous contentious issues with its framing.

Following the judgment, two books have been published directly covering the scheme and its impacts. The first is *The Aadhaar Effect* and the second, *Dissent on Aadhaar*. A third book, *We Are Data*, examines the regime of personal data created in digital form by such schemes, in tandem with other generators, many of which are commercial exploitations of online social services, offered free for use in return for almost unrestricted data access.

Usage of Data

This review article places the project and its impacts within the ambit of massive data collection and how it is being, can be, and, ominously enough, will probably be used, by coalescing these three studies.

"We believe this is a project in perpetual beta," concludes *The Aadhaar Effect*. To underline it, the cover title is casually misspelled "The Aadaar Effect," on the book spine. For many, this kind of shallow carelessness typifies a project that was conceived in haste, implemented post-haste, and will be forever in catch-up mode.

To the authors, however, the rapidity with which the use of the number was enforced across the country, coercing over a billion people to sign up for a new documented identity, in spite of the fact that over 99.97% were found to already possess at least one, is laudable.

Ten years down the line, the default use of the number remains, largely, presentation of "the card," a printed acknowledgment of enrolment issued as is by UIDAI. The mockery this makes, of a transformational shift towards nationwide digitisation of functional systems, does not seem to faze its promoters.

Portability also remains a question mark, as is exhaustively documented in *Dissent on Aadhaar*. When systems demand authentication, as has been tried in both pilot and policy in some areas, notably in Jharkhand, it resulted in starvation deaths amongst those denied issue of welfare, as the direct outcome of inability to comply (Tewary 2018).

Reasons for non-compliance range from the failure to register biometrics, to failure of the system itself (lack of connectivity, lack of electricity, etc). Overwhelmingly, the "card," produced as a "proof" of identity, serves to clear more trivial barriers, such as airport entry, where identification documents are incessantly demanded. Efforts have been made in recent months to "enhance" the value proposition of the card by printing it with a QR code that authenticates it, when scanned with the camera of a mobile phone, if the phone is equipped with the appropriate software.

However, that postdates the existing usage of the "card," to the extent that, in submissions before the Supreme Court over the years, the government pleader continually referred to it as a card. Finally, in detailing the judgment through a judicial order, the Court itself, in its majority opinion, terms it a card. Note, the judgment itself is not a subject of either of the books, both of which were substantially written before the judgment was issued (*Dissent on Aadhaar* adds a few pages mentioning the judgment, but the main essays were written and edited earlier). This report, therefore, will avoid discussing the aftermath of the judgment, which was delivered in September 2018.

The third book, *We Are Data*, explicates why any judicial ruling that permits the identification scheme to continue makes the discussion of partial impacts irrelevant, in any case. While it is not particularly India-centric, it provides a huge insight to understanding the overt impacts of data discovery, which is inbuilt to the

manner in which UIDAI has promoted the use of the UID (Unique Identity Number). This goes well beyond the layer made visible to most people, an identity card that opens various artificial barriers.

For most people, this aspect, some document that is recognised by others as a form of identification, is the most relevant and important. It is also the basis on which the project was initiated.

Unfortunately, it turns out it may not be the most critical reason for actually promoting this project. Across the world, multiple commercial services have been created that trade on the free access to data, in return for free furnishing of some service perceived as being useful. The penetration of these services in any geographically distinct population, however, hinges on the availability of other services, central to the policies by which those populations are governed. Without the services, people do not generate enough digital data.

The most important is connectivity, but connectivity is irrelevant without the availability of electricity. India, nearly two decades into the 21st century, lacks pervasive ("seamless," a term that implies 24×7 availability in all directions a person can move) facilities for both factors. This means that digital personal data is not driven bottom-up in this geography. The UIDAI project, therefore, is necessary to paper over this gap.

As it turns out, it is not justified on grounds of non-availability of an identification document in any form, for a majority of people in India. Submissions to the Supreme Court by the government over the years acknowledged that a vanishingly small percentage (0.03%) of people actually turned up at UIDAI enrolment centres to register, without at least one such document in hand. Yet, in 2018, *The Aadhaar Effect* blithely attributes (p 2) the lack of such documents as the overwhelming justification for spending public funds on the project.

The book continually bypasses such inconvenient realities (the "document gap" is only one of many). Despite this oversight, which appears to be deliberate, the book still has some interest, principal being the perhaps unconscious description of how a private-sector driven project, whose private sector gains are obvious (and laid out in painstaking detail in *We Are Data*), was packaged as a public sector scheme. Even more interestingly, it also describes how the tensions between private and public sector interests have eventually found the project apparently running in the public sector, while its gainful spin-offs are completely positioned within the private sector.

This factor has been commented on elsewhere, describing how centralised systems are routinely compromised by bureaucracies across the world. This has resulted in the generation of documented "successes" that are figments of imagination at best, flights of fancy sometimes, that lead to exceedingly dire consequences—large number of deaths, for instance, and destruction of an entire national economy—when used for planning and policy decisions in large countries.[1]

As related in *The Aadhaar Effect*, one of the objectives of creating a digitised identification system was to bypass the generation of such invented record-keeping. However, there was little or nothing in the design of the implementation that actually dealt with this issue. This is minutely covered in "Dissent on Aadhaar," from essays dealing with the effects of systems linked mandatorily to the number, demanding instant authentication of the individual in order to authorise the issue of welfare (such as foodgrains), to a description of how a much-ballyhooed digitisation of land records ultimately resulted in a service that, far from improving the system it replaced,[2] demanded and was dependent upon a host of new logistic hurdles.

In the case of welfare deliveries, no provision was made for tracking the actual amount of foodgrains delivered to the beneficiary, long reported (by the promoters) as one of the principal sources of malfeasance in the system. Instead, the onus has shifted on to the beneficiary, who is mostly illiterate, has poor quality biometrics, is unfamiliar with computers, and does not even know or understand that this shift in balance has taken place. In the meantime, while this exercise was being carried out, several states actually implemented alternative methods of welfare delivery tracking, focusing on earlier stages of distribution, resulting in close to total elimination of losses. Naturally, where such improvements have taken place, there is no significant purpose to digitising end-user identifications.

Core Purpose

More importantly, it is clear from rosy-hued descriptions of the development of the project, that welfare efficiencies are not the core purpose of the project. They do, however, provide a seemingly credible reason for the government to fund, and more importantly, insist upon the usage of such a system. To this end, both governmental and extra-governmental authorities (notably, the World Bank) have deliberately and fraudulently misrepresented welfare spends as savings,[3] leading to the impression that the project is working, despite its obvious failings (*Wire* 2017).

This creates a different set of problems with the manner in which the project has been implemented, which is not the subject of either of the two books mentioned above, though. To understand this problem area, it is necessary to have read the very first book brought out on the project, prior to the completion of the hearings. This is *The Sham ID, Called Aadhaar: Hoax of the Century* by (retired colonel) Mathew Thomas (2018).

Tireless investigations of the contracts signed by UIDAI, with a range of consulting firms and data processors, led to the discovery that not only was permission given to make copies of the data collected, but that the main contractors had serious links to foreign intelligence agencies, principal among them the United States (US)-based National Security Agency (NSA). The NSA has a mandate from the US government to surveil all electronic communications worldwide, with the exception of that of US citizens (Makkar 2017).

It is, however, not technically possible to definitively exclude the communications of US citizens from that of foreigners, when exhaustively funnelling in everything. The discovery that this was an ongoing illegality, following large-scale publication of communications declared secret by the NSA (by the actions of one of its former contractors, Edward Snowden), resulted in US courts ordering the immediate cessation of all activities that might result in US citizens being surveilled.

When questioned, the UIDAI, however, declared that it was unaware that the contractors were not Indian companies. This thin excuse is based on the fact that all bidding contractors were required to set up offices in India, prior to bidding. The contracts permit the data processing businesses to maintain copies of all data, and do not mandate supervision of such duplicate databases. For a long time, the UIDAI attempted to block release of such information, on the specious claim that the contracts also included clauses that might be confidential in terms of competitive business. However, the requests had not asked for release of such clauses in the first place, and the revelation of commercial secrets could have been justifiably redacted.

It appears likely that, for reasons that have not yet been forensically established, nor judicially enquired into, even by the Supreme Court, before which petitions were filed and included in the set adjudicated together in 2018, the entire database of Indian residents who enrolled has been shared with foreign interests.[4]

As it turns out, not all residents may be of interest to foreign intelligence agencies as such. But, on reading *We Are Data*, it becomes obvious that, in order to adequately identify persons of interest, it is necessary to have a much larger database, the universal set, from which relevant persons can be identified for flagging as worthy of tracking. That is the unsettling side of mass surveillance in the digital age, while an allegedly more benign purpose, identification of persons who might be commercially valuable, justifies the effort.

For most persons who are digitally active, it is a welcome innovation, begun in the very last year of the previous century, that free services of perceived usefulness are available. But, in return, wide access to personal data drives much of new wave global surveillance, the surveillance that is not directly the work of mandated "secret service" organs of various governments of nation states. Rather, it is the work of commercial organisations that have, in under two decades, become the largest purveyors of advertising in the world. Just two of these, Google and Facebook, have revenues and reach that put them head and shoulders above all known advertising businesses that dominated the 20th century.

Even advertising, although it may benefit commercially from access to targeting of a nature that puts the famous words of Lord Leverhulme in the shade ("Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half"), is not the problem; at least, it is not the whole problem (Ogilvy 1963).[5] There is a strong possibility, discussed exhaustively in John Cheney-Lippold, that persuaders within advertising-driven services, such as social media and searches (the characteristics of the primary businesses of Facebook and Google, respectively), actually drive consumer behaviour.

This is achieved by restricting choices perceived as being universally available (to the extent that they can be accessed via the World Wide Web). Such restrictions are enormous enough to actually mould and shape public opinion itself, in a remarkably grainy sense. Grainy, in this context, refers to the degree to which influenced audiences might be narrowed, and the purpose of this whittling down is to arrive at the absolute individual level.

Now, it turns out that this individual does not actually need to be the person that is "I." It is, instead, the person that is the sum of data points that approximate, asymptotically, but in remarkable degree, to "I." The purpose of digital identification then, is not so much the identification demanded by the nation state, the historical origin of identification, as distinct from the social origin of identity, but the shaping of a consumer of commercially viable goods and services. The approximation is asymptotic, only because we presently lack the technology to perfectly map every moment of every day of life in every detailed biological sense. The data-gathering points, however, are increasing rapidly. Even so, "we" are data, but data is not "we."

Manipulation

The size of these sets is huge, by any standard excepting that of the genomically digitised real being. They enable daily manipulation of the data accessed by any person. In turn, this shapes the data "I," to the extent that the person "I" is blissfully unconscious of such manipulation. In modern research terminology, the "individual" person has been effectively replaced by the "dividual" set of data, one that emulates the person. It is this dividual that is useful to any corporate entity—government or private—that is both accessing the data from (and thereby, defining) the dividual, and is interested (motivated) to manipulating the data that will be accessed in future (meaning, the future that begins immediately after now) by the individual.

And, from the simple social media and search engines that kicked off this acceleration in both data-gathering and targeted data deliveries, the attractors have become much more persuasive. Health and quality of life, for instance, as promised by health tracking devices that offer familiar entry point services, such as wearable timekeeping. For example, this article[6] extols the ability of Apple Watch, a timekeeping wristwatch device made by the information technology consumer products and services giant, to prevent cardiac incidents, by issuing timely warnings to users. The device encourages users to share online biological indicators emanating from one's own body. Ownership of the data is far from assured: indeed, it is "necessary" to share it, on the grounds that accumulated user data will help make future health predictors even more accurate.[7]

Such devices, relatively expensive, may seem hardly relevant to countries like India, where potential users may be in low percentages. But this is an obvious fallacy: consider that estimates of India's middle class, perhaps 50% of all smartphone users in the country, exceed

the entire populations of well over 90% of all other nations severally.[8] Targeting this scattered audience might have been a Herculean task in the mid-20th century, but, thanks to projects like this one of the UIDAI, which has linked the number to the phone numbers and banking accounts of a majority of the "worthy" residents, it is trivial. Furthermore, the practice of using wearables is itself a social phenomenon, one that is highly susceptible to influencers that are already obviously making use of the kind of data gathering—*sousveillance*—taking place constantly. With constant ongoing innovation in wearables, it is not inconceivable that some low-cost variant may soon find popularity (that is, millions of users) in India.

For present-day Indians, wearables and such instantaneous data-gathering devices of "deep" data may not, of course, be as relevant as the ability to manipulate open access to information, in a manner that leaves the individual unaware that the dividual is being constrained. For a nascent democracy like ours, plagued by poverty, illiteracy and lack of accessible media, the ability to manipulate those bereft of easy sources of information has long been demonstrated, as the repeated election of charismatic politicians shows. It is the ability to influence those who believe they are better informed that might lead to results that confound.

The public dissemination of data collected by UIDAI has been repeatedly established, very often by websites maintained by the government itself, at both the central and at state levels. This has usually been due to incompetence or poor technical design of web pages hosted by the government, but, very recently, criminal charges have been filed against a private company that evidently had access to the data of nearly 8 crore residents, collected (the case is under investigation, but an officer of the UIDAI has publicly commented that the data formatting appears remarkably similar to that of the UIDAI database maintained by Central Identities Data Repository (*Times of India* 2010).[9] The case complainant is, in fact, UIDAI itself, because one of the provisions of the law governing the authority reserves the right to file charges solely to itself.

Far from residents being protected, as envisaged under the Constitution, the only extant law in place currently places the onus for investigation and filing charges on the government itself, and within the government, solely upon UIDAI, for offences that involve data collected by the UIDAI. As has been made clear from records released by UIDAI itself, a significant number of cases filed charged journalists and publishers who revealed that such data thefts were taking place, while the total number of cases filed number far less than one hundred. However, a massive number of agencies contracted to UIDAI for data gathering have been dismissed for activities that include data fraud.[10]

No explanation for the lack of charges against such data fraudsters has been furnished till date.

In conclusion, a very large exercise has been publicly documented, through several books and voluminous literature, and its purpose seems to be somewhat different from what was publicly announced, and for which public funds were allocated. A country where personal data was both difficult and expensive to collect and collate has been rapidly converted, to the point where high quality data gathering has become alarmingly simplified.

Other nations had years and decades to come to terms with such massive data-gathering exercises, and built up, in fits and starts, some amount of political resistance and lawmaking[11] to attempt to contain it. For India, it has taken less than a decade, and there is little evidence of legal systems matching up to the challenge. Individuals need not be lured here, to turn over their data in return for superficially attractive commercial services, such as free email and ease of social communication, involving the sharing and exchange of rich media in small communities. The exercise here has been enforced and coerced, through direct and threatened denial of essential services, upon both needy (woefully poverty-stricken) and comparatively well-off sections of the population, by direct governmental intervention. In doing so, 1.3 billion people have been dragged into a net that only a few, mostly technologically aware but politically immature, can see, much less acknowledge. The net is ostensibly digital, but it has the potential to be not unlike stainless steel razor wire, when abused by interests inimical to a free democratic republic.

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NOTES

1 Harari, Yuval Noah, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, HarperCollins, pp 402. In Part II: The Storytellers, from footnote 3 on page 166: citations from Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government,* and others, describe the generation of almost fictional records of agricultural output in China and Tanzania, two nations in which centralised reporting systems had been rigidly created by the 1960s. The farm outputs thus documented formed the basis for national policy that, in the case of China, led to a massive famine that reportedly killed tens of millions, as real grains were exported wholesale, leaving little for local consumption, and in Tanzania to the destruction of a viable and thriving local agricultural ecosystem, the mainstay of the economy.

2 The author of the impugned essay, *Inside the Plumbing of Technology Projects*, Jonnalagada K, provides an insight that technology projects in public service domains basically reroute responsibilities, from the local authority (the ration officer, for instance, in a district) to a technology designer. However, this person has no actual accountability for endpoint service deliveries. Worse, such public service projects rarely build in a self-correcting mechanism for public comment and correction, either during the design stage or following the rollout of the programme.

3 The *Wire*, an online publication, reported on 3 October 2017 that the World Bank had misrepresented Indian government welfare spending as savings accrued from the UID project. This was done by misquoting an actual study carried out where the welfare spending figure was estimated. This was then presented as savings, even as the study pointed to potential savings that might accrue if a number of other factors were actualised (but were not actually in place). Following the exposé, and after a series of sharp letters were sent to the institution, the report was reluctantly "corrected." However, until a year later, senior World Bank representatives continued to attribute Indian government spending estimates as savings, primarily to provide support for its own global programme, branded ID4D (identity for development). The motivation for such misrepresentation is very sharp: given the need to miscontrue identification systems, which are basically expensive technological interventions, as substitutes for identity, a social construct.

4 As reported by Ogilvy (1963). However, the attribution has been questioned, and may be apocryphal. Even so, it refers to an age well

before digital communications became commonplace, in fact, even before the first telephone conversation took place.

5 Hall (2017). There is a movement towards "wearables," computing devices that are normally attached to the body by various means, either on a strap or as clothing, even to the extent of being actually surgically embedded. This is different, although doubtless may be considered related, to the surgical implantation of prostheses and medicated devices, since such devices are empowered with either direct or networked computing power of their own, and could be further enhanced to allow some independent decision-making, based on the data gathered and analysed.

6 However, protection of that data from casual access is not so simple. In some countries, it may be necessary, given strong local laws. In India, where protection of such data is regarded by the Constitution as a fundamental right, there is in fact no effective civil or criminal code, or even jurisprudent precedent, for penalising individual or corporate entities who deliberately or accidentally disseminate such data, unless such dissemination also includes activities that might constitute other forms of crime, such as theft, for which routine statutes are in place. The fundamental right to privacy has no matching laws to penalise its breach. However, the wanton creation of rules and laws to breach privacy is possible to contain, by approaching high courts and the Supreme Court, *post facto*, in case the safeguards built into legislative practice prove insufficient. This has been the case following the executive order of 2019 that created the UIDAI, and the subsequent passage of the money bill that was converted into a law by signature of the President, in 2016. Parts of that law were struck down in 2018 on grounds of unconstitutionality, and review petitions that question the remaining law are pending, as of this writing.

7 WP(C) 9143 of 2014 before the Delhi High Court). Unlike the large set of cases "clubbed" together before the Supreme Court that were eventually adjudicated in 2018, this case has remained unheard, before a staggering number of successive justices who either retired or were removed from the case. This is a matter of record.

8 There are many estimates circulating, both for the fuzzily defined "middle class," and the actual number of smartphone users, in India, and have been for decades. The reasons for this are not hard to comprehend: neither is India's "middle class" equivalent to that of the middle class of countries that industrialised 50 to a 100 years earlier, nor do patterns of ownership and usage of phones in India match those found in other countries. Phone usage, for instance, varies widely from a single phone used by many members of a family, to two or more phones used by a single person. In both cases, users might belong to the economically defined "middle class," but for whom disposable income may not actually be available for opportunistic spending, in the same manner as might be found routinely for individuals in say, Europe or the United States. Phone usage patterns, both for the ostensibly simpler "featurephone," and for the more adaptive smartphone, are likely to be culture-specific, and India is in itself a grouping of highly individualised cultures.

9 The text of the letter addressed to the concerned police station, which is in the public domain, makes it clear that the data has been hosted with Amazon Web Services, outside India. It speculates that the data was acquired by the accused company illegally, from either UIDAI itself, or from the various state resident hubs. This acknowledges, incidentally, that data gathered by UIDAI and claimed (in the proceedings before the Supreme Court) to be hosted under conditions of great security at Central Identities Data Repository was shared with multiple agencies outside of the control of the Central Government, apparently with poor safeguards and little concern for potential misuse.

10 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules_en. The European Commission revised, in 2018, its common data protection rules, applicable both for persons and entities residing within the nations who subscribe to the European Union (EU), and also to those outside, who want to do business with persons and entities in the EU. Such business may directly or indirectly involve data handling both within the EU and outside, and the new rules lay down the legalities and conditionalities of doing so. In particular, the rules lay down very stringent penalties for mishandling of such data, and breaches will be punitively punished. Some commonplace businesses, delivering services online, found themselves unable to comply, and shut down their offerings within the EU. Despite this well-publicised exercise, which took years in the making, there has been almost no commensurate protective legal framework development in India, which has claims to being an IT-savvy nation. We continue to lack a basic data protection framework, and an exercise conducted through 2018, with the purpose of starting such a legal framework, has been widely criticised for the emphasis it lays on protecting data-handling businesses, rather than the persons whose data is involved.

11 Speech of Ravi Shankar Prasad in Parliament on 10 April 2017 stating that 34,000 agencies have been blacklisted.

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Spectacle as a Response
The COVID-19 Pandemic

FARHANA LATIEF, REYAZUL HAQUE

The way COVID-19 pandemic is being understood and addressed makes it a spectacle in the Debordian sense, in which all the social relations are mediated through images and appearances. Where even the desire of a safe and healthy life is dealt not with dignity, and effective, accessible healthcare, but through virtual images. Such a spectacle, in turn, creates a world that would be connected more, while the people would live a fragmented life on which they will increasingly lose their control.

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The threshold that we stand at today represents a well-discussed and an obvious question, which is, how will the COVID-19 pandemic transform the world around us? The significance of this question cannot be overstated. In order to reach a possibility of unpacking as to what will become of the world due to the COVID-19 situation, we need to dissect and decipher how our world perceives this pandemic. As we will see below, the way we perceive a pandemic determines the ways we respond to it, and the measures we undertake accordingly, in turn, contribute to what we become as a post-pandemic society. In this article, we attempt to outline the nature of the responses to the pandemic and what those responses really embody.

How is the world perceiving COVID-19: As a disease, that is, merely a medical phenomenon? Or a pandemic, which is much more than a disease, a vector behind a global crisis of social, economic, political and cultural dimensions? It is clear from the worldwide responses that COVID-19 is considered much more than a disease. Officially declared as a pandemic, it has overarching implications on our everyday material and social life. In order to understand the distinction between the two, let us see what essentially constitutes the two.

A disease is a malfunctioning biological condition of a living body, a "biological insult" to it (Willsher and Murphy 2020). A pandemic, on the other hand, is a "worldwide spread of a new disease" (WHO 2010). Given the conditions, dynamics, fissures and interconnectivities of the world, this essentially means that a pandemic is much more than a disease and constitutes a complex set of elements.

In the case of a disease, as we get to know about the actual cause and methods of prevention and cure, the more it establishes a somewhat familiar relationship with the society. With familiarity, the disease becomes part of our system of common knowledge that we live with. And hence, the society adjusts to the disease and the consequences thereof, without going into a state of collective frenzy and panic, no matter how much uncertainty it brings to personal life.

Then what leads to such a hyper response to the disease that is declared a pandemic? Certainly not the actual scale of harm that the disease could inflict on lives. A very common and seemingly less harmful disease like influenza causes death of 6,50,000 people every year. The most feared cancer takes 96,00,000, while AIDS takes 7,70,000 lives every year. COVID-19 has taken 7,71,036 lives in the course of around eight months.

This cursory survey leads us to the key to understanding the public response to the pandemic that lies in the speed with which a disease travels and the social and medical uncertainty that it brings. In a certain moment of history, what makes a disease a pandemic is its occurrence as a global risk, and it being a novel disease. Needless to say, the global and novel aspects of disease are always a construction, and the perception about the social and biological nature of disease that becomes pandemic is created through public discourse and managed by public administration.

Making of the Pandemic

From this we arrive at the constitutive triad of a pandemic that Bjørkdahl and Carslen (2018) describe to be inherently political. They illustrate that a certain kind of public, managed through the mass communication system, and the politics being practised through governance constitute the responses to a disease when it becomes a pandemic. These constitutive entities, the disease, the public and the politics, are essentially entangled, and the epidemiological and medical responses that the people and the state undertake are themselves constructed by way of politics and communications. The controversy around WHO's decision to categorise COVID-19 as a

pandemic suggests how political a disease can be (BBC News 2020a). It means that the medical response to the pandemic operates within the pre-existing cultural and social environments. And governments play an important role in coordinating and managing the pandemic by preparing the healthcare system and by providing the requisite information to the public about prevention and cure of the novel disease, who hitherto are oblivious to the nature of the disease. And as the disease becomes pandemic, that is to say, as the disease sees no nation state division, states are compelled to cooperate at the global level for its management.

In the next section we will evaluate how the trio interacted and how the entangled entities contributed to the creation of, we argue, the spectacle.

The Pandemic and Its Discontents

From the initial indifference to the novel coronavirus to the eventual global hype it received, the mixed responses reveal the prejudices and biases of the prevailing global order. As long as the virus remained limited to China, and other non-European countries, it was not perceived as a severe threat begging for attention. But as the virus made an unwelcome entry into the unprepared lives of the people in Europe and the United States (US) and their governments, it became a global emergency. Suddenly, countries rushed to prevent the spread by closing down domestic as well as international public movements. By the time the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March, the social, political and economic life of many parts of the world were already on halt, or would come to a halt within days.

From within the fissures of this halt, we could see the glimpse of what this pandemic really meant to our world. Or in other words, what this world really meant. It revealed the deeply insecure social life across the world, and showed highly unequal, discriminating, exploitative and hierarchical chasms of this hyperconnected globe.

Take, for example, the case of understanding of the disease. Any response towards the prevention and cure of disease is based on how the disease is perceived and felt. Understanding COVID-19—the virus got its formal global identity not until it had found popularity in the name of Chinese disease or Wuhan flu—began with finding an "other" to blame. The Chinese government initially took the disease as an act of sabotage, an "illegal activity" from a "stubborn," "impertinent" element (Hegarty 2020). Outside China, not just in media reports, but sometimes in government communications (McNeil Jr and Jacobs 2020) as well, it appeared as a "Chinese" virus that was causing some strange illness among Chinese people (Willsher and Murphy 2020), or perhaps to the people, who ate Chinese food (Frost 2020). For the Europeans, it was an "invasion" from Chinese workers and tourists (Muzi 2020), for the many nations in Africa, the Europeans were the danger (Thomas-Johnson 2020), for the US government, it was done on behalf of the Chinese government, and for Indian right-wing establishment it was nothing short of a terroristic act from the Muslims. Such dominant communications formed a certain kind of understanding of disease, which was always an act of hostile human actors construed as the other.

While this narrative was being built around the pandemic, governments remained unprepared (Gilman 2020). As the disease continued to spread, the politics that had the responsibility to assess the risk and inform the public about it, remained oblivious.

The only measure that was adopted in infected regions was the lockdown with varying degrees of intensity, without knowing and addressing the needs and concerns of the public. This is contrary to what the political system is supposed to do in such a situation—in order to serve the purpose of good governance, the political system must adopt a two-way channel of communication in which, first, the peoples' concerns could come to the administrative apparatus so that those concerns are addressed and second, provide the masses with reliable information with a degree of sympathy that they could relate with and be assured. This would help to make a public that is informed enough to act accordingly and stay unconfused, un-paranoid and unbaffled. Instead, from a "non-serious chinese infection" to a global pandemic, the communication about COVID-19 saw a pattern. It has been a one-way, top-down communication in both the situations. Therefore, the public that was created everywhere was largely confused, ill-informed about everything, divided and deeply anxious.

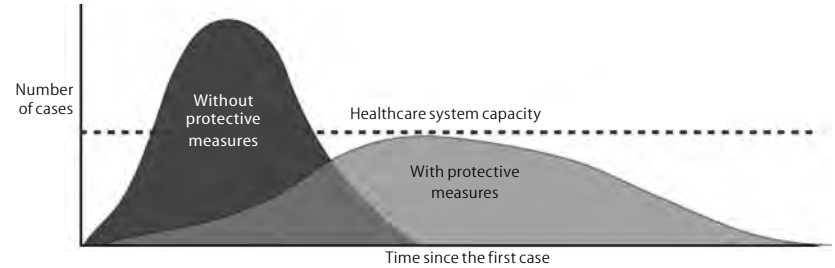
Despite the fact that there has been an international system to track, warn and collaborate with governments in the case of health emergencies, the constant lack in recognising the severeness of the situation despite warnings of lack of basic public health infrastructure, and the economic and social crisis that ensued, resulted in a situation when regimes across the world could do little to intervene effectively (Pisano et al 2020). However since the disease was already being seen as an invasion, and since the people were dying in large numbers, appropriate actions were demanded, but as governments were broadly unprepared, they failed to provide proper medical and health response. What happened as a consequence turned the pandemic into a spectacle that became a matter of appearances.

Spectacle, as French philosopher Guy Debord (1967) described it, is an all-pervasive situation where social relations are mediated through appearances. He notes that a spectacle works as "an affirmation of appearances and identification of all human social life with appearances" (Debord 1967). According to him, when it happens, the reality as such becomes inaccessible and spectacle itself is taken as real.

However, these appearances are not appearances of a contextualised, historical reality. They are made of images that are isolated from daily life and merged in a way that we cannot get to the real, unified picture. What Debord meant with the spectacle is that social life ceases to be a lived experience and becomes a fragmented, detached representation of life, that can be called as a form of a "*pseudoworld*."

The politics of the world responded to the pandemic by casting it into a spectacle by means of communication about the disease to the public.

Figure 1: 'Flatten the Curve'



Adapted from CDC/*The Economist*

Source: Harris (2020).

The Matrix of Spectacle

To begin with, the spectacle is not something that is planned and imposed from outside. It is not a conspiracy. Rather, it becomes the way of life in a society that, according to Debord, isolates and alienates people through the production and consumption of the goods. Spectacle is the product of a system that promises the individuals everything in order to extract their productive labour, but unable to deliver it to them equally or at all, because of limitations created by the rules of endless profit. Despite this continuous betrayal, what keeps people to continue working for the system and consuming its products is the spectacle, which is an inverted understanding of life where appearances are everything. These constructed appearances determine the reality to be visible to people, and hence negate the bona fide reality. This way the spectacle facilitates the existing arrangement of profit and power. Deprived of actual control over the material world and personal life, it is the way people have gotten used to living in this world. Every day has been turned into staged appearance, disconnected from each other, deprived of its true meaning.

The spectacular world that Debord analyses, continued to live in its negated reality until the coronavirus disease *appeared* as a real threat. But unable to deliver what was needed in the face of such an emergence, the system turned this disease too into a spectacle.

What it means is that the image of the pandemic that was constructed by the political system through the means of communications was meant to mask reality. And by controlling the narrative through visibility and appearances, it has been trying to control the public and their freedoms and rights in a way that serves the current order of exploitation everywhere. As the regimes in the world adopted a one-way communication, the disease management and discourse was manoeuvered into optics, into a set of consumable appearances.

Rule of Image

The one-way communication about the spread of disease and its management is literally visualised in a graph of two curves with the message—"Flatten the Curve" (Figure 1). This is the most circulated and talked about (Wilson 2020) image during COVID-19, which not only represents the top-down, authoritarian measure—that goes by euphemisms like lockdowns, restrictions, curfews, stay at home orders—that could be effective against the spread of pandemic, but also the centrality of visual regimes in the pandemic management.

This graph operates at three levels: one, in the name of preventing the spread of pandemic, it invisibilises the actual condition of health services and supplies around the world; two, it invisibilises and silences the actual needs and concerns of public and makes the top-down approach an all powerful communication that is required today; and three, as a directive—flatten the curve—phrased in the terms and context of healthcare and medicine, the graph is a visual mechanism of control over the lives of individuals and societies.

That health services around the world have nothing to do with healthcare or medicine, but are only about the profit is not a new reality. What Elisabeth Rosenthal says about the American healthcare system is nearly true for the whole world, that it is deeply flawed, it has become unaffordable, and it does not deliver (2017: 10). The graph of the curve ironically acknowledges and makes this fact apparent that health services are not able to provide simple needs of the population in any health emergency; however, as it is designed to propagate the directive of stay at home, and provide a general logic of draconian lockdowns everywhere, it immediately invisibilised that reality about healthcare services. Instead of raising questions about them, the population is made anxious and fearful about their situation in case they do not follow the line.

Although the exact origin of the graph has not yet been determined, the idea of flattening the curve has its root in a paper of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) of the US. While discussing the non-pharmaceutical interventions in case of pandemic, it suggests measures like keeping the kids at home to prevent the spread. The current graph that has been circulated since February is based on an initial graph published in the paper; the only major difference is that now it has a dotted horizontal line, added by Harris (2020), an assistant professor at the Thomas Jefferson University College of Population Health, that represents the capacity of the healthcare system. This graph is only conceptual; it was never based on any data, neither in 2007 nor in 2020, but it became part of the scientific fact around, and definitive visual of, pandemic management. When it became popular, various countries adopted and popularised it without making any effort to improve healthcare services or without any deliberation and consultation with their public, and without taking their needs into account.

The reason for the popularity and its widespread use lies in its visual clarity and its accompanying message about "flatten the curve." Even without a graph, this phrase is what Mitchell (1994) would call a "pictorial text." In the face of a threatening infection, people were asked to perform something abstract that was expressed in visual terms, there is a "curve" that has to be "flattened." People might not have understood the meaning of this message and ways of doing it in practical terms, but the visuality of a graph, and the risks and limitations inscribed in it, made the imperative so urgent and immanent that they could not defy it. It

is not surprising why this graph that actually visualises the (in)capacity of the healthcare system has been able to invisibilise any discourse of reason and reality of this incapacity and has successfully prevented it from becoming part of a popular discourse and hence a reason for any discontent.

It is not to say that the measure suggested by this graph was unnecessary or it has not been able to prevent the spread of COVID-19. What we are saying instead is that the graph, along with continuously pouring images through media and public communication, by doing what they are doing, make the pandemic response primarily a matter of optics and enable the governments to absolve their responsibility and culpability in the catastrophe and instead use it as a weapon to crush dissent of any kind in the name of restrictions.

Optics and Reality

The war of optics is battled with appearances. Lives do not matter, only appearances do. The reality is dispensable. And this is what was done, for one, in India, when the political establishment started taking COVID-19 seriously: the reality was dispensed with. Prime Minister appeared on television on 23 March and announced one of the most severe lockdowns of the world on the people of India (Daniyal 2020). After people had fulfilled their responsibility of banging pots and firing crackers in large gatherings for scaring away COVID-19, they were given a four-hour notice before midnight to collect food and essential items for at least three weeks. He spoke like a head of a household, in which he dictated people, scared them, but never tried to convince them of anything. And he never told them how he was going to take care of their actual well-being, of their health when the pandemic would hit hard. As we will come to that, this one-way political communication formed a certain kind of public in India.

The Indian government first said that COVID-19 is not a health emergency (PTI 2020), and then proclaimed a *mahabharat* against it (*Times of India* 2020), asked its people to pay ₹4,500 for COVID-19 test, while it spent only ₹5.32 per day (Mehra 2020) on the healthcare of those it calls its citizens. There has been no effort made by the government to increase the patient–doctor or patient–bed ratios which is currently as low as eight physicians and less than nine beds for every 10,000 people. The reality that is dispensed off is so stark but what is the point of discussing this reality, when you have a punching bag called minorities to blame for the spread of pandemic (Slater and Masih 2020)?

Amid all the strategic deployment of mythology in the containment of pandemic for majoritarian consumption, Modi's government continued exporting masks, testing kits and ventilators (Mishra 2020) while in India, there had been reports of undertesting and underreporting of COVID-19 cases (BBC News 2020b).

With these aspects of reality, that do not appear anywhere in the discussions around pandemic but have been part of everyday experience of peoples' lives, lack of credible information and one way communication from the political systems has created a state of panic among the public. In India, daily wage-earning working people in cities suddenly found themselves with no work and scant resources. When they had nothing to eat and nothing to pay their rents with, they left cities in trains, by buses, on foot and got stranded midway. They were sprayed with toxic disinfectant by public officials on reaching hometowns (*Al Jazeera* 2020), and many among those who walked, took trucks or special trains died on their way home (Banerji 2020). They knew, in this country there is nobody that would care about them, stand for them.

The exodus, and occasional protests (Khanna 2020), of migrant workers in India reflected a trust deficit between public and politics, it also revealed a complete lack of security net, social and economic, for the overwhelming majority of people of the country who work days and nights to secure their livelihood in addition to making cities what they are. It also shows what the establishment thinks about them: insignificant. They are expendables for the state, whose importance is limited as an input in the production system, and when it comes to their life and safety, they are left on their own.

With this approach of the politics towards people, where export of protection gear is preferred over equipping native front-line workers, where people are given four hours to make arrangements for surviving three weeks assuming that is possible, where workers are invisibilised, panic becomes an omnipresent component of everyday life. People desiring social security are deprived of it, which, as Agamben (2020) observes, is increasingly manipulated and exploited by the governments to impose the emergency measures. Hence the panic is being created and used by state machinery for achieving different goals, other than security of food, dignity and shelter of the masses.

This whole set of actions or inactions illustrates how the pandemic is being treated as a spectacle.

Images and Imagination

By manipulating reality, spectacle helps the system to change bonafide reality in cunning ways. It presents the socio-economic-political situation emerging out of the pandemic not as a construct but as natural and inescapable (a vast inaccessible reality, Debord would call it), therefore it becomes difficult for people to see through, understand and resist what is being done in the name of pandemic management, in the name of public good.

For example, many Indian states changed the labour laws in the name of dealing with the economic impacts of pandemic (Misra and Iqbal 2020). These changes range from relaxing the different protections provided to the workers to the complete suspension of all the labour laws, including the protection of minimum wages. In a time when workers are suffering severely from the crisis of loss of livelihood and social guarantee, suspending these bare minimum laws is going to hurt them the most. But those changes are enforced in the name of coping with the pandemic, and hence it becomes difficult for people to resist it. Any resistance to such authoritarian use of power is shown to be anti public good, public health and the overall crisis. In the same vein, the government in India has crushed all the protest movements (mostly against the anti-Muslim citizenship act) across the country, and has used the lockdown to

crack down on and arrest critical thinkers and activists. Since the justice system is nearly non-functioning due to the pandemic and lockdown, that possibility for legal relief from such actions is also closed for those who need them the most (Dixit 2020). Uncontested police brutalities, legal regression, securitisation of daily life, all of this is becoming normal and justified in the name of securing public health.

While such drastic changes are being done in the name of dealing with the pandemic, as for the actual disease, people are told that most of the infected people will never show the symptoms, that many of those who develop the symptoms will not need to have medical care, and that they will recover on their own. It means people do not have to ask for healthcare, the treatment, protective gear, paid sick leaves, etc. They do not have to ask for protection from being sacked from jobs, or being evicted from houses due to unpaid rents.

People are living in a real-time risk, which is overshadowed by whipped-up panic and callousness of governments. The risk is not from any external enemy, but the risk of hunger, destitution and death. People are forced to adjust their lives according to the manufactured panic without any concrete proposal of measures to mitigate the harm posed by this risk to real lives.

But the spectacle machine does not want anyone to dwell upon critical questions that it considers banal and meaningless. Here, even the risk is saleable and consumable on a mass level. It presents fancy people working from their fancy homes through fancy devices and superfast internet, with plenty of the essential items delivered by drones. If you cannot go out to eat, you can order food from home. If you feel claustrophobic in cities, you can go to beaches and on luxury islands. There is a special package for everything. What is being discussed is the perks of virtual connectivity, benefits of online courses in universities (of course it will end up in some structural adjustment; remember that good old word of the 1990s?). What is being propagated as a need of the hour is the requirement of increased automation that will push many more of the workers on the streets, jobless, homeless, and starved (Corkery and Gelles 2020).

And then privilege speaks and people wonder why there is so much of disbelief and mistrust, so much desperation and panic among the masses.

Implications

In the beginning we had a set of questions that this article attempted to address. We were concerned about the responses of the public and governments to the pandemic and what such responses reveal about the nature of both. And an analysis of those responses to the pandemic would help us understand how COVID-19 is going to transform the world.

As we know historically, societies themselves underwent changes while responding to the pandemics. For example, the first wave of the bubonic plague pandemic perhaps contributed to the fall of the Byzantine empire. Similarly, its second wave in Europe expedited the breakdown of what we know as feudalism (Sayeed 2020). The emergent city administration and surveillance apparatus in premodern Europe is a well-known instance of how conception of plague as disease caused by miasma, propelled the European societies to adopt measures to manage the population, especially the working class sections of cities, and to regulate the daily waste.

As Snowden (2009) has shown, this caused a robust city administration that was equipped with public funding to maintain the cleanliness of the area and it installed elaborate systems like sanitation and surveillance. With time, as Foucault (1995) has demonstrated in his lectures, this provided an initial, inclusive disciplinary model for the modern state.

Since pandemics are a long-term phenomenon, the governments exploit such emergency situations for extended obedience and submissiveness to extraordinary measures from the people. With time, the emergency regulations can get normalised in everyday life and this helps the political systems to become ever powerful with a readily powerless and subjugated public. What Foucault wrote about a plague-stricken town of 17th century Europe, that the "town, traversed through out with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilised by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies—this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city," continues to hold true for the current pandemic situation. The fear of uncertainty over health and public safety makes people adhere to those regulations that are supposed to be temporary, but with time they become a habit and get internalised in social and public life.

We are already witnessing the much-popularised "stay distant, stay safe" slogan, which, although meant for ensuring safety of oneself and others, has reinforced xenophobia and has perpetuated the social and communal divisions in the name of keeping the infection, the enemy, at bay (Sinha and Haque 2020). Similarly, the extraordinary powers given to police during the lockdown could become a permanent feature of the law and order policies in post-COVID-19 times, if there is ever going to be a post-COVID-19 time. Technological interventions such as the mobile tracking applications have been made mandatory by the governments to combat COVID-19 that compromises the privacy of the people (O'Neill 2020).

In countries like India, where tests are scarce and treatment is a nightmare, such tracking applications become tools in the hands of governments to exercise unhindered power over the public. What these tracking tools essentially do is make the presence of the state felt even in isolation and seclusion. Hence the "public" that is constructed is one of self-censored prisoners, who know the omnipresent gaze is vigilant to punish them in the case of any dereliction from the expected behaviour. This becomes the classical case of Bentham's panopticon, which Foucault (1995) offers to illustrate in the following way: "they are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible."

The pretense, all is well, continues to be staged and managed through the spectacle, while the governments are normalising the enhanced securitisation in the name of public good and people are ready to give up their leftover freedoms through whipped-up panic in exchange for supposed security, that actually they

will never get. Individuals are expected to act responsibly, while responsible institutions are nowhere in sight.

The pandemic has exposed the dark underbelly of the liberal order. Be it the healthcare crisis or the plight of migrant labourers, the pandemic revealed the fault lines and the shortcomings of the liberal order in the world—a system of unrestrained market based on profit accumulation only breeds inequality and injustices. And without justice—economic, social, cultural—there cannot be a truly democratic, truly equal, truly healthy society.

In Conclusion

While Foucault identifies the apparatus of visibility as one of the essential elements of the governing model of current society, he does not fall short on reminding us that visibility is a trap. The age of Babylonian Modernity that we live in, to borrow from Mirzoeff (2005), starting from the end of the 1980s, facilitates the vision but snatches away the right to look: we are to be seen from everywhere but we can see nothing. We are being blinded by appearances. Our realities are fractured and buried under the wreckage produced by "weaponised images" and militarised languages (Mirzoeff 2005: 121). Societies are the products of the spectacle that also consumes them.

The reason why this reality is kept out of the reach of the people, why it is smashed and fragmented in alien shards of appearances, is because for the establishment reality cannot be trusted in the hands of people. If they know the reality, they can try to change it. If they know how the dreams are being crushed, they can try to defend them. If they know what the truth is, they can also perceive the machines of falsity and make them stop.

If only they know what the spectacle is, they could also try to unsee it.

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Extending Design Thinking to Public Policy
A Prototype for Fiscal Rule

R K PATTNAIK, RANJAN BANERJEE

Design thinking as a subject has grown enormously in theoretical content over the past 50 years. However, both design thinkers and policymakers have not come closer to developing design thinking in policymaking. Recognising this research gap, a prototype called the basic resource gap model has been designed as a supplement to the extant fiscal rule, with fiscal deficit as its target. The study highlights both the potential applicability of the design-thinking approach to the process and specifies an application that can supplement the extant fiscal rule and potentially enhance fiscal management.

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Design thinking has undergone significant expansion, both in terms of theoretical content and practical application since the first systematic discussion on the subject in Simon's *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1969). Initially grounded in the field of engineering, design thinking gradually and successfully moved to applications in product and service innovation as it has the "potential to improve problem definition and mechanism design in policy making processes" (Mintrom and Luetjens 2016). Design thinking has gained currency as solutions emanating from its application are progressively refined through an iterative process of providing a voice to the end users and engaging them in shaping decisions (Allio 2014). Notwithstanding this, design thinking has made limited progress in its application in public policymaking, even though there is huge potential in this field, because of the presence of unintended consequences (Shergold 2015; Mulder 2017; Norman 2013).

Evidence suggests that public sector innovation (PSI) labs are, of late, helping to create a new era of experimental government and rapid experimentation in policy design (McGnn et al 2018). However, such applications are limited to micro aspects of public policy, such as public transport systems, malaria eradication programmes, etc (Hasso Plattner Institute 2010). The application of design thinking at the macro level of policymaking has been limited due perceived qualms among researchers that policies cannot be designed in the manner that a house or piece of furniture can (Dryzek and Ripley 1988; Deleon 1988). However, there are conversely some researchers who opine that design thinking has ample inherent potential to systematically study and improve policy design, and that application of design thinking to policymaking leads to more nuanced solutions (Brown 2008; Howlett 2014; Schon 1988, 1992).

This paper intends to bridge the research gap in the application of design thinking to public policy. First, we review the literature on the evolution of design thinking and its application in policymaking. Second, we illustrate elements of the design-thinking process by understanding those elements of the policymaking process that could be amenable to a design-thinking approach. Third, in tune with design-thinking methods, we conduct in-depth interviews with both policymakers and policy implementers, in order to recast the policymaking challenge in a manner that aids effective implementation. Finally, we attempt to study a specific application based on these insights, that is, the application of design thinking in the

design of a prototype for the existing fiscal rule. Our suggested prototype could be helpful for end users to target the fiscal rule in a more inclusive manner to the budget-making process. Our prototype is not an alternative to the existing fiscal rule; rather, it supplements the present system with a focused approach that complements the existing rule.

While there is no unambiguous and universally accepted definition of design thinking, there is a broad agreement that "design thinking is generally defined as an analytical and creative process that engages a person in opportunities to experiment, create and prototype models, gather feedback and redesign them" (Razzouk and Shute 2012). Simon (1969) described the word "design" as "changing existing circumstances into preferred ones." In subsequent research, design thinking has been referred to as having an explicit human- and user-centred approach. It leads to solutions that are

> progressively refined through an iterative process of providing voice to the end users and engaging them in shaping decisions (professional empathy and co-creation), of considering multiple causes of and diversified perspectives to the problems at hand (scaling) and experimenting initial ideas (prototyping and testing). (Allio 2014; Georgiev 2012)

Key Features of Design Thinking

Application of the scientific method: In the budding stage of design thinking (mostly in the 1960s), researchers emphasised the application of scientific methodology and processes to explain its functions. During this period, the focus of research was on introducing design thinking as a rational science, and technologist Buckminister Fuller heralded the 1960s as the "design science decade," Fuller called for a "'design science revolution,' based on science, technology and rationalism, to overcome the human and environmental problems that he believed could not be solved by politics and economics" (Cross 1982, 2001, 2004).

Wicked problems: These refer to extremely complex and multidimensional problems are at the very heart of design thinking because solutions require a collaborative methodology that involves gaining a deep understanding of human motivation. Horst Rittel, the design theorist credited with coining the term "wicked problems" in the mid-1960s conceived them as a "class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing." Thus, wicked problems are a class of problems for which there is no off-the-shelf solution, which affect the state or society systemically, and for which different stakeholders have radically different world views and divergent frames of understanding; or which have no definite formulation (Crowley et al 2017; Rittle and Webber 1973).

Linking creativity and innovation: The origins of the term "design" lie with the private sector and conventionally revolve around art and science to shape objects and symbols creatively and in an innovative manner (Ralph and Wand 2009; Moggridge 2001). Increasingly, the notion of design is expanding into shaping decisions, and this is where design becomes "strategic" (Brown 2009). Creativity is the generation of new ideas that can be either new ways of looking at existing problems, or of seeing new opportunities, perhaps by exploiting emerging technologies or changes in markets. Innovation is the successful exploitation of these new ideas. It is the process that carries them through to new products, services, ways of running businesses, or even new ways of doing business. Design links creativity with innovation. It shapes ideas into practical and attractive propositions for users or customers. Thus, design may be described as creativity deployed to a specific end (Cox 2005).

Five-stage model of design thinking: According to the five-stage model proposed by the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (2010), the stages of design thinking are: (i) empathise with the end users by understanding the situation from their perspective; (ii) define the end users' needs, their problem, and your insights; (iii) ideate by challenging assumptions and creating ideas for innovative solutions; (iv) prototype to start creating solutions; and (v) test solutions. The term "user" is distinct from the term "customer" or "consumer" as used in marketing. A user is anyone who comes into contact with the product or service regularly and has an informed perspective on the product or service. There are multiple distinct categories of users for any problem, and this in turn implies a multi-stakeholder perspective.

Policy Process, Opportunities and Challenges

The public policy design process is a complex one. It usually involves identifying a problem, developing possible solutions, identifying key stakeholders and a period of negotiation. The success of a policy is usually measured in terms of outcomes and treatment effects (Allio 2014). The public policy design process is focused on key power players, namely legislators, top ranking bureaucrats, industry associations and lobbyists. In this process, empathy with the end user is systemically ignored (Scott 2018).

Policy prototype: One of the most visible outputs of design thinking are policy prototypes. A prototype is an early sample, model or release of a product built to test a concept or process, or something be replicated or learned from. Prototypes are conceived to test and trial a new design, in order to enhance precision by system analysts and users. Prototyping serves to provide specifications for a real, working system rather than a theoretical one. Thus, the idea of prototyping implies that policy solutions elaborated through design thinking are not necessarily an end in themselves. Prototypes are seen as "vehicles of change" or "Trojan horses" because their very launch and testing trigger spillover effects not only on their subsequent refinement, but also—and more importantly—on the formation and function of the more diffuse layers around them (Boyer et al 2013). Further, the prototyping of a new public service delivery sets out different challenges than designing and testing fully-fledged public policies (Nesta 2011).

A prototype is a tangible representation of an alternative policy process. It could be an alternative flow chart for governing implementation of the rule-based fiscal policy. It is important to note that a prototype is not a final solution, but an alternative that can be used to collect user feedback and to fine tune the process.

Design thinking approaches, when implemented well, can deliver a number of benefits to public policy decision-making, contributing towards people-centred perspective; reduced risks of partial approaches; comprehensive and holistic problem solution perspective; reduction in duplicated efforts; enhanced synergies; integrated and better targeted solutions; stronger reality checks at earlier stages; reduction in risks of unintended consequences; and chances to deliver more complete and resilient solutions (Allio 2014). Bason (2010) provides a synthesis of what design thinking has come to represent in public service innovation. He considers design thinking as principally a structured and systemic "attitude" or a "way of reasoning" that allows bridging and managing the two opposing forces, that is, the analytical–logical mindset, which characterises the largest organisations and professional bureaucracies. More importantly, design thinking highlights the value of early engagement with stakeholders. The writings of many design-thinking scholars highlight the benefits of the process of consultation with the stakeholders (Buchanan 1992; Dorst and Cross 2001; Liedtka et al 2013; Rowe 1987).

Global experience: In the context of cross-country experiences with design thinking, some projects have been launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). However, these are typically service-oriented, for instance, with an aim to combat child malnutrition in Vietnam (Brown and Wyatt 2010); and maternal mortality ratio improvement in sub-Saharan Africa. A growing number of public innovation labs mostly in advanced economies have been established to address design-thinking prototypes for public services (DCC 2013). Some of the most visible labs are Denmark's MindLab, the Centre for Excellence in Public Sector Design in Australia, Singapore's the Human Experience Lab (THE Lab), and the Thailand Creative and Design Center (TCDC). Similarly, in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom (Cabinet Office Policy Lab), design-thinking labs have been set up to address the lack of design skills in government departments.

Insighting Process

Creating a prototype requires an "insighting process" that involves detailed interaction with end users and the use of design thinking tools to record and capture insights. As a sample policy problem, the budgetary process involved in assigning the fiscal rule has been selected.[1] Here, empathy with the end user and selection of prototype are critical. Our approach is as follows: first, we conducted in-depth interviews with policymakers and policy implementers to understand their perspectives with an "empathy map."[2] Second, we used the insights to reframe the policy problems, that is, the modified use of budget-making process in the fiscal rule as a prototype.

The insighting process included policymakers and implementers because the former are designers of the public policy and the latter are its end users. Our respondents included luminaries like Y V Reddy, former governor, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Chairman of the Fourteenth Finance Commission; Indira Rajaraman, member, Thirteenth Finance Commission; and R Budhhiraja and Sudhir Srivstava, both former principal finance secretaries of the Government of Maharashtra.

Our objective is to create a demonstrative prototype, that is, the suggested prototype is not intended to supplant the fiscal deficit as the target variable, but to supplement it with an integrated and improved budgetary process. Our engagement with the policymakers and implementers was in the form of personal interviews. Some of the contextual and representative questions placed before the respondents were: (i) How do you define public policy? (ii) How is public policy designed for multiple stakeholders? (iii) Are there any limitations in designing public policy in general and in the budgetary process in particular? (iv) What is your experience of the design of fiscal federalism in India? (v) What is your view on the designing of the existing fiscal rule for state governments in India? (vi) What are the constraints of the end users (in our case, the budget officer) in the process of implementation?

The insighting process strengthened our research capability to use the outcome in order to reframe the policy problem, which is a modified use of the budget-making process to create a prototype fiscal rule for the existing rule. The key aspect that our design seeks to answer can be reframed as: How do we enhance flexibility in the current budgeting process, keeping the constraints of the user (in this case, the budget officer) in mind? We present some of the themes that emerged. The following section represents a summary of views that evolved through qualitative interviews.

Defining and designing public policy: Public policy, which is an interactive process, broadly refers to policy encompassing social and economic issues and public institutions. However, in the broad definition, public policy also takes into account private institutions whose actions impact people at large as a result of some political and other compulsions, and unstated objectives getting precedence. In the context of fiscal policy, in a federal set up like India, there is flexibility in resource availability with the central government as compared with the state governments. Therefore, the hard budget constraints are more noticeable in cases of the state governments (Goffin and Micheli 2010).

The design of budget policy is largely arbitrary as budget-making is a political process. The burden to be placed on future generations on account of public policy decision and intervention is a political decision and not an economic one. While applying design thinking to budget policy, the focus should be on the iteration process of receipts and expenditure, keeping in view the resource constraint in a hard budget framework. It is important to recognise the institutional capacity and absorption

capacity of a particular line department (a department other than the finance department), and thereafter take a view on resource transfer through the finance commissions (McGann et al 2018).

Another important aspect is to distinguish between technical efficiency, allocative efficiency and dynamic efficiency. Technical efficiency is related to minimising input for a defined output, allocative efficiency is the use of resources, and dynamic efficiency is the capacity to improve in the future. Allocative efficiency is important in designing the budgetary process, as users are different. With respect to budgetary allocation, there is a choice when multiple users are present. The choice of user is essentially a political consideration. The allocation of resources is politically determined, and there is a political cost and political benefit. Economists and bureaucrats only provide inputs for technical analysis. The political objective is that the political party in government should be re-elected. A broad stakeholder consensus is required. It is desirable that stakeholders are made aware of the stress and contradictions in the budget-making process.

Resources transfer to state governments: Two important institutional arrangements in designing transfers are finance commission transfers (both taxes and grants, which are as per the Constitution) and non-finance commission transfers from the federal government. The finance commission, even though a constitutional policymaking body, has its own constraints. First, because of time constraints, the finance commission does not meet all the stakeholders. Second, its design is such that normally, the voices of the finance ministry, finance department and the chief minister tend to predominate, while the voices of the other ministers are absent. Third, there is the constraint of a "principal agent problem." There are moral hazards as the ultimate giver and ultimate receiver never meet at the discussion table. It is important, therefore, to take cognisance of the receiving agents. In this context, the application of design thinking will result in better policymaking. The budget-making process is an elaborate process where the other ministers interact and give their views, but their suggestions are mostly populist in nature and usually overruled by the finance department. Therefore, there is a big gap in designing public policy and allocating resources to different departments of the state governments.

The sharing of grants by the finance commission is an interesting issue in terms of tied and untied funds. The finance department always opts for tied funds, but all other line departments opt for untied funds. Unlike the finance department, line departments are not interested in horizontal and vertical equity. However, larger wisdom prevails with the finance commission members, and they take care of the untied funds for the other departments, granting some release of funds other than special purpose grants.

Constraints of skill development: The skill development of the budget officer is often found lacking. The secretary of finance learns on the job, without any expertise. Updating the knowledge of the budget officer is a must, considering that specialised persons are not appointed for the task. There is not enough clarity at the end-user level on both goals and means.

Limitations of the budget-making process: The fiscal architecture design is an important issue. While making budgetary decisions, the finance minister, finance department and line departments do participate, however, the finance minister and finance department overrules the demand of additional funds on the ground of budget stress emanating from the lack of resources. There is a gap between the expenditure suggested by the line departments and expenditure actually approved by the finance department, and this expenditure gap is not made public. However, the expenditure gap debate should be made public because this draws attention to the need for appropriate levels of services for a particular level of government vis-à-vis the restrictions imposed by the finance department to reduce the level and magnitude of expenditure on account of revenue constraints.

The present practice to measure deficit indicators as percentage of state income is not appropriate, as the measurement of state income is artificial and, moreover, is not under the state government's control. The budget-making process suffers from artificial estimates, as revenue needs to be matched with expenditure to keep the fiscal rule target. There is political interference and fiscal discipline goes haywire. There should be conscious efforts to adhere to fiscal discipline at the political level. Political leadership should understand and respect public policy at the design and implementation level. There are interdepartmental tensions in formulating public policy. Since the resources are scarce, some expenditure, though desirable, does not get adequate provisioning.

One important issue is that in the budget-making process, there is no distinction between the centre and the states as far as fiscal deficit as a target is concerned. The research question should focus on designing improvements in the budgetary process without questioning fiscal deficit.

Political intervention: The budget-making process is politically guided, and at the technical level, there is limited flexibility. The political consideration is that a big budget is always better, and politically, the budget is essentially incremental. The policymaker at the technical level is only involved in the analytical process to convince the political leadership on what is feasible and not what is politically desirable. Since the goal of budget policymaking is highly political, it is difficult for the technical policymaker to improve the budget-making process if political leadership is not aligned. But technical leadership can place before the political leaders a well-defined recommendation.

Prototype for Existing Fiscal Rule

The experts interviewed appreciated our proposed research efforts to apply design thinking to public policy in the context of the budget-making process. They opined that this approach will not only be helpful to strengthen the broad consensus

among the multiple stakeholders, but also sensitise the stakeholders including the end users on the various processes involved in the budget-making process in a federal set up.

Our ideation process around the fiscal rule[3] suggests that a true picture of state finances does not emerge because of: limitations of fiscal deficit as the sole target of fiscal rule; institutional constraints of finance commission and non-finance commission resource transfers; and constitutional constraints on the borrowing by the state governments.

Fiscal deficit, as defined broadly, reflects the net borrowing requirements of the government. To that extent, it captures the liquidity of the system from the financial savings angle. But it does not reflect the public policy impact, particularly in the context of the finance commission awards in terms of demand for resources (needs) and capacity to raise resources.[4] Furthermore, the magnitude of fiscal deficit is under/overestimated in the public account components of reserve funds and deposits, where many such reserve funds and deposits are intra-governmental in nature and do not even carry interest payments. Moreover, since fiscal deficit is a net concept, it does not recognise repayment obligations by state governments. Since the market borrowings by the state governments have become the major components, following the recommendations of the Twelfth Finance Commission to do away with the plan loan components from the centre, it is important to examine the process of the fiscal road map, taking into account the repayments on market borrowings.

There are three institutional constraints on state finances. The first emanates from the finance commission awards in terms of share in central taxes (SCTs) and the statutory grants from the centre (SGFC). The second constraint comes from the central transfers in terms of non-statutory grants (NSGFC) and loans from the centre (LFC). The third constraint originates from the financial market in terms of consolidated fund borrowings (state development loans/market borrowings). According to Article 293 of the Constitution, the state governments cannot borrow from the external (cross-border) market, and even domestic sources of borrowing are limited and subject to approval of the central government.

Basic Resource Gap Model

In view of the above, while designing a prototype, our focus is to hand over to the budget officer a clear, unambiguous and transparent budgetary process incorporating the institutional and constitutional fiscal needs, and resource requirements to meet those needs, by adhering to a "golden rule," otherwise known has the "public finance golden rule" (Bénassy-Quéré et al 2019).

While the fiscal rule under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003, as alluded to earlier, does not explicitly mention any golden rule in terms of receipts and expenditure, we have constructed a resource gap approach in respect of state governments as the prototype to fiscal deficit, which we call basic resource gap (BRG) model that recognises the golden rule mentioned above. In marked contrast to the fiscal deficit as the target variable in the FRBM Act, the BRG model as a prototype clearly unfolds the fiscal dependency of the state government on the federal government and the fiscal stress emanating from the financial market, particularly in terms of market borrowings.

The present fiscal rule with a ceiling on fiscal deficit at 3% of the gross state domestic product (GSDP) and the debt-to-GSDP ratio at 20% has the limitation of not looking at the complete budgetary process, particularly in the context of availability of resources to the state budgets. These include: (i) own resources; (ii) tax devolution and grants based on finance commission awards, and discretionary transfers in terms of grants from the union government; and (iii) borrowings from the market. Corresponding to these three sources of resources, we have compiled three variants of BRG, namely BRG 1, BRG 2 and BRG 3. To elaborate, in BRG 1, own resources (both revenue and capital) are taken into account. In BRG 2, the tax devolution and grants that are constitutionally mandated in respect of the state governments are added to BRG 1. In BRG 3, the discretionary component of fiscal transfers, loans from the centre and market borrowings are added to BRG 2.

In our BRG model, the total expenditure (TE) = the total resource requirement (TRR).

TE = revenue expenditure (RE) + capital expenditure (CE) (including repayments of central loans and market borrowings but net of public accounts net payments).

TRR = revenue receipts + capital receipts net of public accounts net receipts.

Thus, in our BRG model, we define the golden rule as TE = TRR.

In a hard budget constraint scenario, the TE is critically dependent on the TRR.

BRG 1 resource (BRGR 1) = own tax revenue (OTR) + own non-tax revenue (ONTR) + internal debt excluding market loans and ways and means advances (WMA) + recovery of loans and advances (ROLA) + net public a/cs (excluding net cash balance investment account [CBIA], deposits with the RBI).

BRG 1 = (TE=TRR)- BRGR 1

BRG 2 resource (BRGR 2) = OTR + ONTR + share in central taxes (SCT) + ROLA + statutory grants from centre (SGFC) + internal debt excluding market loans and WMA + net public a/cs (excluding net CBIA, deposits with the RBI).

BRG 2 = BRGR 2-BRGR 1.

BRG 3 = TRR-BRG 2

Based on BRG 1 and BRG 2, we worked out fiscal dependency ratios (FDR), that is, FDR 1 and FDR 2 to assess the extent to which the state governments depend on the federal government for resources. FDR 1 = BRG 1/TRR and FDR 2 = BRG 2/TRR. Having calculated FDR, we have attempted to work out the fiscal stress (FSR), that is, the extent to which the state governments are required to mobilise resources that are more volatile, unstructured and uncertain as these are exogenous to the state governments. We find that FSR = BRG.

We club these items under BRG 3. These include: non-statutory grants from the centre (NSGFC) + market loans + WMA + loans and advances from the centre (LAC). These items are also sources of FSR.

The advantages of the proposed prototype are that, first, the end user knows the resource gap both in the revenue and capital accounts in terms of the consolidated fund and public

account, which is the core of the budgetary process. Second, the end user is also introduced to the fiscal dependency and fiscal stress.

We as designers have not tested our suggested prototype directly on users. Instead, we test our prototype by applying it to historical data. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to test the BRG with the budgetary data. The data so worked out are presented in Tables 1 to 8.

While the derivation of BRG and BRGR is presented from Tables 1 through 6, the critical part of our data analysis on FDR and FSR is presented in Tables 7 and 8. Illustratively, the empirical findings as set out in Table 7, broadly suggest that in respect of the consolidated position (all states together), on an average—for the fiscal period 2014 through 2017—nearly 50% of the total resource originated from the dependent and stressed sources (FDR 1). A further break-up of this reveals that while resources from dependent sources were 22% (FDR 2), the resources from stressed sources were 28% (FSR) of the total dependent resources (FDR 1). In addition to this, a perusal of Table 8 reveals that the stressed resources (FSR)

Table 1: TRR = TE (₹ crore)

States	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
1	2	3	4
All states	21,03,763.21	24,47,640.11	28,31,495.8
Andhra Pradesh	1,37,749.35	1,95,971.22	1,66,882.62
Assam	47,978.61	42,767.73	58,002.06
Bihar	94,378.95	1,12,541.65	1,26,292.37
Karnataka	1,28,543.59	1,42,428.47	1,69,600.76
Kerala	82,579.77	93,058.71	1,10,080.24
Maharashtra	2,11,354.32	2,23,268.38	2,57,009.51
Odisha	67,231.59	79,202.43	86,554.44
Punjab	72,081.29	75,951.81	1,39,347.11
Rajasthan	1,16,330.38	1,70,243.8	1,61,608.44
Tamil Nadu	1,57,661.6	1,68,925.36	2,07,899.92
Uttar Pradesh	2,35,755.51	3,03,549.41	3,33,553.82
West Bengal	1,42,119.61	1,53,122.75	1,58,565.18

Source: Data are compiled from a study of state budgets, various issues, RBI.

Table 2: BRG 1 Resources = BRGR 1 (₹ crore)

States	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
1	2	3	4
All states	11,03,943.19	12,24,787.78	13,49,483.4
Andhra Pradesh	75,186.35	1,00,989.62	66,520.67
Assam	17,096.96	9,957.6	22,067.6
Bihar	29,451.36	31,735.32	27,641.16
Karnataka	79,404.69	87,057.9	95,212.7
Kerala	50,541.96	53,957.59	65,262.26
Maharashtra	1,41,605.47	1,45,239.92	15,6031.06
Odisha	33,521.74	36,287.13	34,627.56
Punjab	32,723.65	34,482.71	82,055.57
Rajasthan	63,826.13	1,06,074.93	89,088.36
Tamil Nadu	95,181.21	98,166.06	1,24,414.22
Uttar Pradesh	1,16,723.18	1,45,621.87	1,40,812.56
West Bengal	54,000.15	52,599.06	52,991.89

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 3: BRG 1 Resources = BRGR 1 (₹ crore)

States	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
1	2	3	4
All states	14,85,742.03	17,93,377.72	20,41,449.4
Andhra Pradesh	93,293.25	1,22,883.41	1,01,756.58
Assam	29,938.61	29,272.45	43,550.46
Bihar	69,453.5	83,534.84	90,119.9
Karnataka	94,058.94	1,11,041.24	1,23,972.64
Kerala	59,547.05	71,680.97	85,296.56
Maharashtra	1,59,335.5	1,73,569.59	1,90,635.35
Odisha	51,114.71	60,978.88	64,745.22
Punjab	39,081.13	42,946.43	92,678.11
Rajasthan	87,303.27	1,36,753.93	1,26,115.71
Tamil Nadu	1,15,628.72	1,20,257.61	1,52,387.86
Uttar Pradesh	1,88,895.25	2,40,939.93	2,57,942.81
West Bengal	80,846.23	99,262.22	1,03,897.2

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 4: Basic Resources Gap 1 = TRR-BRGR 1 (₹ crore)

States	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
1	2	3	4
All states	9,99,820.02	12,22,852.33	14,82,012.4
Andhra Pradesh	62,563	94,981.6	1,00,361.95
Assam	30,881.65	32,810.13	35,934.46
Bihar	64,927.59	80,806.33	98,651.21
Karnataka	49,138.9	55,370.57	74,388.06
Kerala	32,037.81	39,101.12	44,817.98
Maharashtra	69,748.85	78,028.46	1,00,978.45
Odisha	33,709.85	42,915.3	51,926.88
Punjab	39,357.64	41,469.1	57,291.54
Rajasthan	52,504.27	64,168.87	72,520.04
Tamil Nadu	62,480.39	70,759.3	83,485.68
Uttar Pradesh	1,19,032.33	1,57,927.54	1,92,741.26
West Bengal	88,119.46	1,00,523.69	1,05,573.29

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 5: Basic Resources Gap 2 = BRGR 2 - BRGR 1 (₹ crore)

States	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
1	2	3	4
All states	3,81,798.84	5,68,589.94	6,91,966
Andhra Pradesh	18,106.9	21,893.79	35,235.91
Assam	12,841.65	19,314.85	21,482.86
Bihar	40,002.14	51,799.52	62,478.74
Karnataka	14,654.25	23,983.34	28,759.94
Kerala	9,005.09	17,723.38	20,034.3
Maharashtra	17,730.03	28,329.67	34,604.29
Odisha	17,592.97	24,691.75	30,117.66
Punjab	6,357.48	8,463.72	10,622.54
Rajasthan	23,477.14	3,0679	37,027.35
Tamil Nadu	20,447.51	22,091.55	27,973.64
Uttar Pradesh	72,172.07	95,318.06	1,17,130.25
West Bengal	26,846.08	46,663.16	50,905.31

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 6: BRG 3 = TRR - BRGR 2 (₹ crore)

States	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
1	2	3	4
All states	6,18,021.18	6,54,262.39	7,90,046.4
Andhra Pradesh	44,456.1	73,087.81	65,126.04
Assam	18,040	13,495.28	14,451.6
Bihar	24,925.45	29,006.81	36,172.47
Karnataka	34,484.65	31,387.23	45,628.12
Kerala	23,032.72	21,377.74	24,783.68
Maharashtra	52,018.82	49,698.79	66,374.16
Odisha	16,116.88	18,223.55	21,809.22
Punjab	33,000.16	33,005.38	46,669
Rajasthan	29,027.11	33,489.87	35,492.73
Tamil Nadu	42,032.88	48,667.75	55,512.06
Uttar Pradesh	46,860.26	62,609.48	75,611.01
West Bengal	61,273.38	53,860.53	54,667.98

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 7: Average 2014–17 FDR 1, FDR 2, and FSR (%)

States	FDR 1	FDR 2	FSR
1	2	3	4
All states	49.94	21.94	28.00
Andhra Pradesh	51.34	15.14	36.20
Assam	67.68	36.32	31.36
Bihar	72.90	45.96	26.94
Kerala	40.51	16.05	24.46
Maharashtra	35.75	11.51	24.23
Odisha	54.77	30.71	24.06
Punjab	50.11	9.20	40.91
Uttar Pradesh	53.43	32.38	21.06
West Bengal	64.74	27.16	37.59
Rajasthan	42.57	20.37	22.20
Karnataka	40.32	15.07	25.26
Tamil Nadu	40.56	13.17	27.39

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 8: Sources of FSR, 2014–17 (%)

	NSGFC/FSR	ML/FSR	WMA/FSR	LAC/FSR
	1	2	3	4
All states	40.37	44.62	13.03	2.03
Andhra Pradesh	31.58	33.32	33.85	1.25
Assam	76.40	20.36	2.89	0.35
Bihar	56.35	40.36	0.00	3.29
Karnataka	40.40	55.53	0.00	4.07
Kerala	20.35	65.76	10.88	3.06
Maharashtra	34.47	60.41	4.07	1.05
Odisha	67.90	26.03	2.24	3.83
Punjab	10.69	29.66	58.34	1.31
Rajasthan	49.24	44.93	0.00	5.90
Tamil Nadu	33.72	63.02	0.00	3.26
Uttar Pradesh	44.91	46.52	7.46	1.12
West Bengal	33.00	47.76	18.17	1.47

Source: Same as Table 1.

have largely emanated from market borrowing (ML) and non-statutory grants from the centre (NSGFC), with an average contribution of 45% in respect of the former, and 41% in the case of the latter for all states together. Thus, the prototype designed by us provides a complete picture of resources available from various sources. This is lacking in the fiscal deficit concept. Thus, the proposed modified rule in terms of BRG, FDR and FSR sheds new light and has the potential to enable superior implementation. It has the potential to reflect on the institutional arrangement imbedded in the budgetary process.

Conclusions

Design thinking as a subject has grown enormously in theoretical content over the past 50 years. However, the application has been limited to development of product prototype based on the Stanford school of design methodology. Despite the strong characteristic features of creation of prototype, both the design thinkers and policymakers have not come closer to developing design thinking in policymaking. This is a clear and persistent research gap, since extending design thinking to public policy will ensure creation of user-friendly prototype. Recognising this gap, an attempt has been made to design a prototype called the basic resource gap model as a supplement to the extant fiscal rule with fiscal deficit as a target.

Our approach to develop the BRG prototype is based on the design-thinking methodology. In order to strengthen the budget-making process, we develop a prototype in terms of BRG, FDR, FSR, keeping in view the institutional and constitutional factors to assess the state finances in a more meaningful manner.

The prototype is process-driven and gives scope to the end user for effective engagement in the budget-making process. The merit of the BRG model is that, it is unambiguous and well within the clear understanding of the budget officer. The BRG model serves as a tangible solution of an alternative budgetary process. However, it is important to note that it is not a final solution. Our study highlights both the potential applicability of the design-thinking approach to the process and specifies an application that can supplement the extant fiscal rule and potentially enhance fiscal management. This being said, our study suffers from the limitation of the prototype being tested on historical data. While the study makes substantial progress in highlighting the potential of a new approach to policymaking, further research can take this ahead through the actual testing of prototypes with users and working with the government to frame and test new versions of both the policy process, and specific output policies. We hope that fellow researchers will take these directions to heart and further illuminate the quality of policy framing and implementation.

NOTES

1 The Treaty on European Union 1992, required member nations to limit annual 3% fiscal deficits to no greater than 3% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and debt to 60% of the GDP. It may be further added that under the Growth and Stability Pack (1997), there was an addition of corrective arm to the SGP (Stability and Growth Pact) 1997–3% fiscal deficit and 60% debt (percentage to euro area GDP). However, this does not apply at a state level. Further, design-thinking studies around implementation are scare even here.

2 Empathy is the centrepiece of a human-centred design process. The empathy map is a tool to understand people, within the context of the design challenge. The problems design thinkers are trying to solve are rarely their own, rather, they are those of a particular group of people; in order to design for this group, design thinkers must acquire empathy for who they are and what is important to them. An empathy map is worked out through an insighting process by observing, engaging, watching and listening to the user (Hasso Plattner Institute 2010). It captures what users "say, do (actions), think (beliefs) and feel (emotions)" in a matrix that is used to record feedback from qualitative interviews.

3 The amended Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 defines fiscal rule for the central government: "the central government shall reduce the fiscal deficit by an amount equivalent to 0.1% or more of the gross domestic product (GDP) at the end of each financial year beginning with the financial year 2018–19, so that fiscal deficit is brought down to not more than 3% of the GDP by 31st day of March 2021."
In the above context, it is important to mention that Section 4(2) of the FRBM Act provides for a trigger mechanism (which could be termed as an escape clause) for a deviation from the estimated fiscal deficit. It may be noted that this clause has been invoked in the Union Budget 2020–21 with a higher deviation of 0.5% of the estimated fiscal deficit to GDP ratio inconsistent with Section 4(3) of the FRBM Act, due to structural reforms in the economy with unanticipated fiscal implications. So far, we do not have any history of invoking the escape clause by any state governments.
It is pertinent to mention that there is a view that primary deficit (fiscal deficit minus interest payments) is a good threshold of fiscal rule (Subramanian 2017). In his dissent note submitted to FRBM committee 2017, he observed that "In contrast, I would propose a simpler architecture comprising just one objective: placing debt firmly on a declining trajectory. To achieve this, the operational rule would aim at a steady but gradual improvement in the general government primary balance (non-debt

receipts minus non-interest expenditure) until the deficit is entirely eliminated."

It is important to recognise that, by definition, primary deficit is a variant of fiscal deficit and revenue deficit. Furthermore, it suffers the same limitations of fiscal deficit as explained earlier. Therefore, the inclusion of primary deficit under the fiscal rule does not enhance the quality of fiscal rule. The mainstream literature supports primary deficit as an indicator to analyse debt sustainability. However, country experience suggests that fiscal deficit has been the global benchmark with regard to fiscal rule. Moreover, our prototype is best explained with the existing fiscal rule indicators for state governments.

4 This refers to own and borrowed resources, given the resources from the finance commission awards in terms of tax devolution and grants.

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Anthropological Archives
Dalit Religion Redux

SAURABH DUBE

This paper revisits earlier ethnographic writing and assumption as an "archive" in order to reconsider Dalit "religions." It explores the nature of power in the caste order when viewed from Dalit positions and perspectives, the historical constitution of caste under the British empire by drawing on recent scholarship, the terms, at once, of the Dalit's critical exclusion from and unequal inclusion in caste domains, Dalit responses to hierarchy and authority in everyday terrains, and, finally, the intimate intermeshing of religion and politics, both broadly understood.

This paper is sustained by the author's many interchanges over two decades with Savi Sawarkar. Ajay Skaria, Indrani Chatterjee, and Anupama Rao who provided critical inputs. The author is grateful also for the comments of the anonymous reviewer. This paper is dedicated to the memory of D R Nagaraj for his open spirit, intellectual generosity, creative disagreement, and warm friendship.

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This paper revisits earlier ethnographic writing and anthropological assumption in the manner of an "archive"—as well as draws upon recent historical scholarship—in order to reconsider thorny questions of Dalit "religions." Rather than a bounded and a priori realm of the sacral, an innate and static repository of the metaphysical, I understand religions as entailing experiential and historical meanings and motivations, perceptions and practices, and symbols and rituals. These are intimately bound to formations of power and its negotiations. Defined by such processual–meaningful, substantive–symbolic, and dominant–dissonant attributes, religions lie at the core of social worlds and their transformations, simultaneously shaped by as well as shaping these historical terrains.[1] Alongside, the paper approaches archives as ongoing, unfinished, open-ended procedures, articulates identities as often contradictory and contingent processes—of meaning and power—at the core of modernity, and explores politics as intimating relations of authority and alterity, dispersed yet intimate, which access and exceed governmental commands and conceits (Dube 2004, 2017). Combining such emphases, I unravel critical attributes of Dalit religions, exploring especially: the nature of power in the caste order when viewed both from Dalit perspectives and from the Dalit position, the historical (politico-economic and cultural–discursive) construction of caste under colonial dominance and imperial rule, the terms not only of the Dalits' absolute exclusion from but their unequal inclusion in the social order, Dalit responses to hierarchy and authority, which look further than their endeavours exclusively within institutionalised power relations turning on state and governance, and finally, the intimate intermeshing of religion and politics, each broadly understood.[2]

Overture

The last two decades have seen a forceful ferment in Dalit–Bahujan intellectual and activist arenas.[3] A formative heterogeneity characterises such fields, these force fields, of scholarship and politics. To take a few exemplary instances, consider the key differences between the political outlook of Chandra Bhan Prasad (2006) and Jignesh Mevani (2017), between the epistemic concerns of Gopal Guru (2009, Guru and Sarukkai 2012) and Sukhadeo Thorat (2009); between the analytical frames of G Aloysius (1997) and Kancha Ilaiah (1996), between the interpretive emphases of Charu Gupta (2016) and Anupama Rao (2009), between the critical outlook of Sanal Mohan (2015) and Suryakant Waghmore (2013), between the engaging

immediacies of Anand Teltumbde (2017) and Suraj Yengde (2019),[4] and between the testimonial textures of Bama (2008) and Sharmila Rege (2006).

This paper implicitly enters into conversation with such interventions, registering that the animation and contention of these terrains are not mere uncertainties to be overcome, but critical constituents of social worlds. The questions/considerations that I offer rest upon particular registers of historical anthropology and critical ethnography, including my own prior emphases concerning Dalit subjects and histories (for example, Dube 1998, 2004, 2010). Thus, I reach beyond the institutionalised political relations of the state and its subjects, seeking power and meaning in formations of caste and labour, ritual and myth, gender and sexuality, and experience and embodiment. Put differently, politics and states are themselves approached through processes of society and culture, insinuating diffuse and intimate relations of authority and alterity.

It follows, too, that Dalit religions spell for me historical processes of meaning and power, labour and gender, and ritual and practice that centrally turn on caste, its containments and contestations. Here are to be found ideas and actions that heterogeneously yet simultaneously entail the social and the symbolic, the bodily and the mythic, the immanent and the sacral, the experiential and the emotional, and the sexual and the spiritual.[5] At the same time, these ensembles appear ever enmeshed with formations of caste, which include, at once, dominant conventions based on ritual authority and popular precepts, with contending dispositions to hierarchy, impurity, and worship, a question that shall be clarified soon. My point is that the nature of caste and its modalities of power can be unravelled only by admitting that Dalit presence, position, and perspectives have haunted and shaped these procedures.[6]

Consider now formidable voices challenging Dalit–Bahujan subjugation: from saint poets, such as Chokha Mela, Sant Nirmala, and Basavanna to key figures including Ravidas, Ghasidas, and Mahima Swami that founded popular religious formations of sect and caste, and onto modern intellectuals and activists, such as Jotirao Phule, E V S Ramasamy Periyar, and B R Ambedkar. On the one hand, these critics distinctly yet acutely registered the configurations of authoritative religion and their persuasions—especially, the doxa and orthopraxis of Hinduism—as constitutive of domination and subordination within matrices of caste. On the other hand, their critiques variously rearranged the incessant interplay between ritual and power in distinct formulations of religion and politics, imbuing these with novel meanings. Taken together, my bid is to allow Dalit religions to possibly hold up a mirror to attributes of authority and alterity at the core of the caste order in different faiths in South Asia.[7]

To be sure, no term is perfect. Upon my usage, Dalit religions as a term lays bare the overlaying schemes of social subjection that articulate caste and its constituents. Namely, adroit alchemies of ritual authority, historical practice, colonial transformations, and modern makeovers that have shaped the subordination and subversion, meanings and actions of Dalit communities. Once more, these designs of dominance and dissonance, palpable and spectral, have been woven into and help unravel the fabrics of caste and power at large.

This registered, I would like to make two final clarifications. First, I return in this paper to intellectual and political issues that are often approached as matters that are already settled, even resolutely resolved (Guha 2014). At the same time, can we speak differently today about past scholarship, using it as an archive, seeking a revisitation of queries that continue to haunt and that we exorcise at some peril? What might we gain by abjuring a readily analytical, sharply scholastic stance, in order instead to approach these archives by reading them against the grain of their exclusive assumption? Can this make possible the learning of critical verities along the grain of these now-reconfigured archives? Second, to speak of "Dalit" as, at once, a category and a mode of a people's self description that challenges their subordination, has key consequences.[8] At stake are urgent demands on tasks of understanding. Revealed once more are the acute inadequacies of ready separations between religious–ritual patterns and sociopolitical processes in discussions of Dalit formations.

Archiving Anthropology

Dalit religions have ever turned on charged questions. Considering anthropological archives, does the alleged extreme impurity and ritual–practices of Dalits place them outside the caste order? Do they have their entirely separate religions? Or, does the very ritual lowness of the Dalits hierarchically, yet vitally, link them to other castes? Does this linkage to other castes exclusively entail an encompassing, consensual caste ideology of purity and pollution? Is Dalit religion, then, primarily a lower form of that of those higher up in the caste order, as Louis Dumont (1970) and Michael Moffatt (1979) once argued?[9]

When scholars such as Dumont and Moffatt present Dalits as primarily reproducing the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution itself projected as a homogeneous scheme, their emphases are beset by at least three critical problems. First, by focusing singularly on purity/pollution as cementing a principally normative caste structure, they externalise the terms and textures of power that inhere in caste formations, especially the modalities of domination and subordination in the caste order. Second, they underplay the other key matrices that shape caste, namely configurations of ritual kingship/dominance, colonial governance, non-Brahmin religions, postcolonial politics, and the modern state. Third, and finally, such emphases underplay the creations within Dalit religions and castes of novel meanings and distinctive practices.

And what of the various positions that stress the radical disjunction of Dalit norms and practices from the caste order?[10] Often well meaning, such proposals bear their own difficulties. First, while these projections understand the manner in which the ideologies and relationships of caste unequally exclude Dalit peoples from several processes, they tend to overlook how caste arrangements also hierarchically include Dalit castes in other arrangements. Moreover, the arguments often underplay the expressions of hierarchy and authority in the religions of Dalits themselves. Here are to be found ritual

articulations that involve practices of endogamy, occupation, commensality, and interactions with other Dalit castes. Finally, the emphases on the innate "autonomy" of Dalit religions usually overlook the matrices and meanings, processes and practices that structure and suture caste.

Taken together, under issue is the key question of power: specifically, the presence of power at the core of caste; this is to say, the wider interplay between meaning and power, religion and authority in caste society in South Asia.

Let us begin with Dumont's exclusive preoccupation with a normative order presided over by the Brahmin and defined by the logics–techniques of purity and pollution. Now, the writings of Dumont—and his supporters—broadly encompass *artha* (economic and political power) within dharma (ideology and status). Here, the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution fixes the extreme poles of the ranking of castes, while leaving "power" only a residual role in affecting this ordering in the middle. At the same time, it is equally important that the "materialist" critiques of Dumont have tended to replicate his absolute separation of and opposition between ideology and power. Here, such critics have tended to emphasise that caste is "essentially" a matter of economic and political power. Thus, ideology—or the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution—is only a gloss to basic inequities and social divisions.[11] Unsurprisingly, both sides—Dumont and his materialist critics—ignore the way power is structured into the cultural schemes, the pervasive meanings, of purity and pollution. In a word, exactly these elisions allow us to underscore that power is central to the normative, meaningful order of purity–pollution.

There is more to the picture. I refer to the work of Nicholas Dirks (1987), Gloria Raheja (1988), and Declan Quigley (1993) that has focused—in different ways—on the ideological, religious, and cultural character of kingship and the dominant caste. Actually, this debate returns us to the issue of power in the caste order. We just noted that the influential arguments of Dumont encompass power within the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution and thus render it epiphenomenal. In contrast, the writings of Dirks, Raheja, and Quigley open up possibilities for discussions of the intermeshing of caste structure, ritual form, and cultural attributes of dominance. At the same time, they also tend to locate power, almost exclusively, in constructs of ritually and culturally constituted kingship and dominant caste. In the end, these positions—an exclusive emphasis on the hierarchical concerns of purity and pollution, which brackets/removes power from religion; and a singular embedding of caste and power within a culturally central, ritually fashioned kingship and dominant caste—as opposed propositions appear as mirror images. On the one hand, the perspective of the Brahmin, at the hands of Dumont, Moffatt, and companions; on the other, the outlook of the little king or the dominant caste at the behest of Dirks, Quigley, Raheja, and the like-minded.

Interregnum One: Dalit Interruptus

Whatever happened to the Dalits? Actually, approaching these issues from the position and perspective of Dalits throws a different light on the nature of power in caste society in South Asia. Consider the low ritual status of these groups and their exclusion from the web of relationships defined by service castes, especially the barber (*nai*), the washerman (*dhobi*), and the grazier in everyday life. All of this underscores that the normative hierarchy of purity and pollution and the principles of a ritually central kingship/dominant caste should not be seen as separate and opposed principles. Rather, they constitute intertwined cultural schemes, both grounded in relationships of power within the caste order. These distinct but overlapping schemes of ritual power have worked together and reinforced each other in the subordination and definition of Dalit communities. And this has happened entirely in conjunction with colonial transformations of caste, especially across the 19th century.

Transformations of Caste

Historical shifts and mutations during the colonial period led to a wider restructuring of caste and power, as profoundly bound to the normative hierarchy of purity/pollution and the ritual centrality of kingship/dominant caste. The issue warrants discussion. Routinely, questions of the colonial transformations of caste, power, and Dalit identities are approached through a primary focus on the imperial state's impact from the 1860s to 1940s on caste categories and religious communities in census enumeration and representative politics.[12] Such focus on the impact of colonial policies is often accompanied by the highlighting of diverse indigenous non-Brahmin movements in western and southern India and increased Christian missionary activity that challenged upper-caste authority. Together, it is argued, the result was the articulation of caste "movements" and Dalit identities, often in the domain of institutionalised politics defined by imperial administration.[13]

Much of this happened, no doubt, yet not quite in the singular ways that is usually insinuated. Indeed, the point is that such exclusive demarcations of imperial transformations overlook other important makeovers of caste in the colonial period. My reference is to the profound changes in political economy, alongside the intricate meeting, mating, and makeovers of Brahminical, kingly, and colonial axes of authority that together reshaped caste and power under colony and empire. Needless to say, these developments carry profound import for apprehensions of Dalit religions and histories.[14]

Consider that the exact locations of caste, rural and urban, were constitutively formed and acutely transformed in the 19th century. Here, I am speaking not only of discursive–cultural shifts but crucially also of politico-economic mutations, making a case for the ways these domains overlap. Thus, we often forget that the Indian village as the locus of caste—in the way these matrices are known to us—emerged principally in the course of the first half of the 19th century. This emergence of the village as the locus of caste in the first half of the 19th century was the outcome of distinct yet overlapping processes of contentious, contradictory meanings and practices. I cannot recount the convoluted story here, which is drawn from a range of historical scholarship.[15] But allow me to rapidly, telegraphically signal certain major mileposts.

We are in the face of the East India Company's practices of settling borders, of controlling populations, and of maximising revenues, alongside its policies of outright warfare and of quotidian conquest. These led to the redrawing of commons, the reworking of scrubs, the rearranging of forests, alterations in climate, and an emphasis on "settled" socio-spatial subjects and terrains. All of this underlay the emergence of an agrarian order, clearly characterised by discrete agricultural castes and petty commodity production, ironing out the ambiguities and categorically demarcating the distinctions between the "civilised" and the "wild," the "field" (*kshetra*) and "forest" (*vana*). Here is the emergence actually of the exact arenas in which caste, as we know it, came to be enacted.

Now, these principally settled ethnoscapes and landscapes from the 19th century onwards were very different from the formatively shifting terrains that had existed up to the 18th century in South Asia. The latter bid us to retrace our steps. For these prior worlds were marked by irregular boundaries between vana, *gochar* (commons, as well as shrubs) and kshetra. Here, nomadic peoples with enormous herds of cattle routinely moved between mountains and plains. Here, shifting cultivators now took up settled agriculture and could again move back to mobile practices all within five generations. Here, ascetics were warriors and traders. Here, *banjaras* and *bagis* were *bahurupiyas*, too. Here, labour, and not land, was clearly the scarce resource, allowing landless labourers, *adhias*, and *kamias* to move on in the face of extreme adversity. The point is that in these critically shifting worlds, caste formations and Dalit identities existed, but they did so in a manner quite unfamiliar, even strange, to us. In such terrains, caste relations and Dalit identities were made and unmade, done and undone in ways very different from what came to be in the coming epoch, beginning in the long 19th century.[16]

None of this is to readily castigate an all conquering, ever efficacious, essentially destructive colonialism. Rather, at play in these processes were the coalescing of colonial rule, indigenous authority, and everyday arrangements. Indeed, it was in these emergent spaces of village society that caste formations came to be crystallised, reordering the terms of purity—pollution and ritual kingship—as well as the auspicious–inauspicious—and carrying crucial connotations for Dalit subjects.

Now, as imperial rule, village society, caste arrangements, and Dalit formations were instituted and elaborated in the 19th and 20th centuries, crucial attributes of the colonial order often emerged at the core of caste. Where am I going with this proposition? Following anthropological assumption, sociological scholarship, historical presumption, and quotidian common sense, caste is meant to be innately Indian. This is to say, caste is irrevocably *desi*. And so, following pervasive pre-suppositions, the colonial presence necessarily remains external to the caste order, except by allowing marginal, subaltern, and Dalit groups to challenge and even step outside these schemes.[17]

My point is different, moving in a distinct direction from the innate opposition between colonialism as a foreign implant and caste as an indigenous institution. In a word, I am proposing that the idioms and practices, meanings and signs at the core of colonial cultures—involving the joint energies of the coloniser and colonised—were often critical in structuring caste and power in their everyday avatars in South Asia. Here are to be found diffuse yet intimate processes elaborating rearranged hierarchies of authority and changed rituals of dominance. Such processes, hierarchies, and rituals drew upon the aspects of colonial governance in the constitution of caste and power.

My own work on the Satnami caste–sect in the Chhattisgarh region has played a key role in distilling these emphases. Satnami oral narratives about village life in the colonial period elaborate the construal of authority within caste society, ordered by the metaphor of *gaonthia zamana* (the era of landlords). This construction–production of authority involved an interleaving of overlapping attributes of dominance. At stake was an intermeshing of the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution and ritually fashioned kingship with the forms of power derived from the colonial order (Dube 1998).

Such focus on the quotidian symbols, metaphors, and practices of colonial rule as reinforcing other axes of dominance and ritual schemes in order to mutually constitute caste and power has wide implication. It suggests the following three propositions: First, the sway of the state and the enticements of governance are not separate from, outside of, the imaginaries and articulations of caste. Rather, they are internal to, intimate with, and constitutive of this creature and concept, institution and imagining, practice and process. Second, this is true not only of colonial cultures but of postcolonial politics, such that the seductions of the state and enchantments of the nation have acquired newer meanings, distinct configurations, and mutating cadences in the articulations of caste in independent India. Third, and finally, such genealogies and mutations carry critical implications for urban alterations of caste and Dalit formations of politics. While the first proposition implicitly informs this paper, the latter two are intimate issues that I cannot elaborate here.[18]

Interregnum Two: Dalit Expressions

All of this is to say that questions of Dalit religions militate against singular solutions, ready resolutions, intellectual—academic aggrandisements—a priori or otherwise, theoretical or empirical, conceptual or factual. Shaped as part of wider hierarchies and relationships of caste, which differ from one region to another, these religions show marked socio-spatial variations. However, even within a particular region, Dalit religions can find distinct expressions in different localities depending on the distribution of landownership and arrangements of authority among castes, which diverge across villages. Further, as was indicated above, Dalit religions have undergone profound changes through state formation, agrarian/urban alterations, and political transformations. The salience of these religions is found precisely within variety, change, and crucial contention. This is an issue that is not only empirical but constitutively critical.[19]

Exclusion and Inclusion

We know of the severe restrictions that have been placed on Dalits.[20] They have been denied entry into Hindu temples and the services of the Brahmin *purohit* (priest), spatially segregated unto living quarters at the margins of rural and urban

settlements, and excluded from the several sets of ranked relationships, ritual exchanges, and social interactions among discrete castes at the core of quotidian life. Highly coded prescriptions have governed the appropriate conduct of Dalits in public spaces, including deferential usages of bodily movements and speech patterns before upper castes; and they have frequently been forbidden the use of markers of honour and status, often signifying kingly status, from modes of transport such as elephants, horses, and palanquins to apparel and accessories, such as upper-body garments, turbans, and shoes.[21]

At the same time, the very locations of Dalits in normative hierarchies and centres have included them in the practices and processes of caste. They have exclusively performed the most defiling activities, entailing contact with severely polluting substances, in rural and urban arenas: from the scavenging of waste to work with leather and labour on cremation grounds, and from cleaning toilets and clearing human excrement to rearing so-called unclean animals, such as pigs and removing the allegedly impure carcasses of sacred cattle. Some of these tasks constitute the primary occupations of discrete Dalit castes; others they undertake while working as agricultural labourers, poor peasants, and manual labourers.

It bears emphasis that the restrictions imposed upon and defiling tasks undertaken by Dalit castes have simultaneously defined their subordination while placing them at the core of caste. This is because only they can perform such pollution-ridden yet essential activities. Unsurprisingly, Dalit presence in the social order has been variously acknowledged, altogether hierarchically and unequally, of course: they have received customary dues, especially on ritual occasions, for their caste-sanctioned duties as well as for agricultural labour; their participation has been critical in ceremonies concerning the unity of the village; and their deities—like those of Adivasi groups that bear an ambiguous relationship with the caste order—have been feared for being violent yet venerated as guardians of villages. This is to say that, in inherently unequal ways, Dalit religions have been embedded in processes of the Dalits' exclusion from as well as inclusion in caste hierarchies and ritual processes.

Distinction and Displacement

Dalits have not accepted and experienced such processes simply, passively. Rather, precisely while participating in hierarchical relationships, Dalit actions and understandings have imbued their religions and caste formations with specific distinctions. Here, the staggering heterogeneity of Dalit religions has emerged bound to the historical constitution of Hinduism. This historical construction of Hinduism has involved the interplay between Brahminical hierarchical conventions that emphasise purity–pollution—alongside kingly and dominant-caste centring of ritual kingship—in the partial continuity between humanity and divinity, on the one hand, and non-Brahminical, lower-caste traditions that bear rather different, even contending, orientations to hierarchy and impurity and divinity and worship, on the other (see, for instance, Fuller 2004; Kapadia 1995). Concerning the latter, the links with non-Brahminical traditions, Dalit religions have displaced, negotiated, and queried normative purity/impurity and ritual hierarchies/centres through ecstatic worship and possession, sensuous devotion and pilgrimage.[22] Sometimes, this entails also religious, social, and gendered inversions, where men acquire female attributes and Brahmans become impure (Kapadia 1995).

At the same time, it is worth recalling that the origin myths of Dalits all over India have subverted and rejected upper-caste representations of their ritual lowness, yet they have equally frequently done so by retaining notions of their own collective impurity (Moffatt 1979: 120–28; Prakash 1990: 45–55). Across the 19th and 20th centuries, Dalit communities, such as the Satnamis of central India, have elaborated new mythic traditions and distinctive caste–sect practices centred on their gurus and a formless god as well as construing novel depictions of deities, such as Shiva and Draupadi (Dube 1998). These innovative religious formations have questioned and contested but also reworked and reiterated the forms of power encoded in caste schemes of purity–pollution and kingly authority (Dube 1998).[23] Still, other Dalit groups have participated in spirit cults, propitiating ancestors and ghosts, to articulate as well as reproduce labour bondage and caste hierarchy (Prakash 1990). Dalit membership of sects, such as the Kabirpanthis, Dadupanthis, Ravidasis, and Ramnamis, has elaborated devotional practices within designs of caste distinctions.[24] Clearly, the common patterns within such variety reside in the fact that Dalit religions have widely expressed the salience of their own actions and understandings, but often as shaped in relation to the ritual power encoded within normative hierarchies and dominant centres.

Taken together, Dalit religions are far from the unambiguous interdependence between the highest and the lowest castes and centrally about expressions of power and enunciations of struggle. The distinct dispositions of these faiths have far exceeded exclusive preoccupations with ritual hierarchy and/or normative authority. At the same time, however, such tendencies have been accompanied by articulations of Dalit religions, with unequal relationships and ritual power at the core of caste to reconfigure these on the margins of the social order. These tangled, tension-ridden processes have defined Dalit identities, resistance, and solidarities as well as their submission, vulnerability, and subordination.

Gender and Kinship

From birth through death, the rites of passage among Dalit castes can suggest lesser and greater concern with ritual purity. Karin Kapadia (1995) argues that among the Dalit Paraiyar caste in southern India, the puberty rituals occasioned by a girl's first menstruation show marked differences from the upper-caste concern with the pollution/purification of the menstruating woman; instead such rites involve quintessentially non-Brahmin attempts to safeguard "the precious, distinctively female ability to create children," and to symbolically construct fertility as sacred female power. The implication is that pollution motifs are less important for Dalits.

In contrast, another account precisely of a Paraiyar woman, Viramma, reveals more ambivalent and earthy orientations to normative purity–pollution, dominant-caste authority, and female

sexuality. It is not only that the Dalits' elaborations of purity/impurity and auspiciousness/inauspiciousness entail varied negotiations of shifting arrangements of caste and power. It is also that even when certain Dalit groups closely follow the rules governing purity–pollution—during rites of birth and death, for example—they do so by conjoining such observances with the distinctive symbols and practices of their own castes and sects (Viramma and Racine 1997).

Marriage and gender among Dalits have been characterised with practices, such as secondary marriages for men and women, widow remarriage, the payment of a bride price (rather than dowry), and bodily freedom from physical seclusion. Yet such arrangements have been themselves embedded in wider patterns of patrilineal kinship and their regional manifestations. Together, this has meant that Dalit women have often possessed a degree of autonomy to negotiate hierarchical relationships of kin and community, marriage(s) and motherhood. Also, their physical labour has been positively valued, practically and symbolically.

At the same time, Dalit women have evidently not escaped the asymmetries of gender and caste, and the inequalities of ritual and class. Such patterns have extended from widespread depictions of the deviant sexuality of Dalit women through to their sexual and economic exploitation by upper-caste men through to attempts at controlling their bodies and labour within their communities (for instance, Dube 2013). Within these overlapping and constraining movements, the apprehensions and actions (and desires and insubordinations) of Dalit women have provided their own twists to Dalit religions and life-cycle rituals as well as wider gender arrangements and caste hierarchies.[25]

Coda

Militating against principally scholastic cerebral endeavours, I hope that the questions raised in this paper might possibly, modestly converse with the ferment today in Dalit–Bahujan intellectual and activist endeavours, which are, of course, formatively political. Far from seeking to be the last word, mine is an attempt at conversation. For, in the end, dialogues, difficult dialogues, are necessary for what remains of our shared humanity, under terrible peril today.

NOTES

1 On these questions, see, for example, McCutheon (1997), Asad (1993), Kelly and Kaplan (1990), Banerjee-Dube and Dube (2009), and Dube (1998: 4–7), and *passim*.

2 Taken together, all that I have stated so far could not be further from that pervasive opposition between a religious India and a secular Europe. Instead, together with identity and modernity, I approach religion and politics as contradictory, checkered, and contended processes of meaning and power over the past five centuries, propositions elaborated in Dube (2017).

3 Constraints of space mean that I have not been able to include other, prior and recent scholarship on Dalits, tendencies that I am acutely aware of. Throughout, I cite only necessary, indicative references.

4 Yet see also, Teltumbde and Yengde (2018).

5 On the only scholarly reference to a Dalit "metaphysics," see Jaaware (2018).

6 I am elaborating here ideas first offered in Dube (1998), considering the salience of "critical margins" in opening and unravelling dominant terms of history, caste, religion, and power.

7 It is in these ways, too, that I appreciate the interventionist and activistic aspect of contemporary critiques of Dalit subjugation as founded in a somewhat uniform, dystopian Brahminical ideology and practice. But I wonder also, if there might not be some place for a conversation that stays with and thinks through the demands of institutionalised politics by equally registering other claims of caste and power on Dalit subjects? It is towards such dialogue that I have presented the pressing implications of ritual articulations, layered connections, critical contentions, spatio-temporal expressions, religious attributions, and historical formations of caste and power for Dalit subjects—not only in Hinduism but within Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and other faiths in South Asia.

8 In recognising and expressing Dalit as a mode of self-description, I am articulating acute issues of the politics of naming. At the same time, I am all too aware of contended notations of self-description that emerged before (not merely chronologically, but as alongside and feeding into) the figure of the Dalit among vernacular publics. See, for example, Dube (1998), Banerjee-Dube (2007), Novetzke (2016), and Rawat (2015). My usage of Dalit exactly admits of such contentions and heterogeneities.

9 For a critical reading, see Deliège (1992).

10 Such scholarly and commonplace positions go back a few centuries and extend into the present. They include, the emphases of the Abbé Dubois, Moffatt (1979: 6–24), Mencher (1974), and Ilaiah (1996, on Dalit–Bahujan religions). The dispositions have become rather more routine in contemporary work.

11 For an able bibliographic survey, see Krause (1988).

12 The labour of imperial administration and governance are often glossed today as "colonial modernity," even "colonial governmentality," buzzwords that I find unconvincing and unproductive. This should be clarified by my emphases elaborated ahead.

13 Such portrayals have become intellectual–political doxa, embedded not only in certified scholarship but a constituent of liberal–radical common sense.

14 The suggestion is not that these changes happened on the same scale and in uniform ways across the subcontinent, but that the transformations of political economy and mutations of power jointly redefined caste in the colonial period. Indeed, such emphases help make sense of the heterogeneities of caste formations in different regions of the subcontinent, as seen in Fukuzawa (1991: 91–113).

15 For reasons of space, I mention three salient studies, whose emphases I have rearranged. First, the imaginative, "revisionist," and suggestive synthetic provocations offered by Chris Bayly (1988). Second, the elaborations of several related issues by Ishita Banerjee-Dube (2015). Finally, Neeladri Bhattacharya's (2018) remarkable, wide-ranging, recent account, which is informed at once by critical anthropology, cultural geography, and social theory.

16 I must acknowledge here the critical insights of Ajay Skaria (1999) at once on "wildness" and "caste," arguments that have yet to find sustained elaboration in the work of other scholars.

17 I am ignoring, of course, the strenuous exorcism and simultaneous transubstantiation by Dirks (2002)—and others of his ilk—that turn the imperial imagination of caste into the Indian practice of caste.

18 As was hinted earlier, especially important here are the consequences of Ambedkar's politics deriving from his position that discrimination against "untouchables" constituted the very core of caste, which led to his rejection of all claims to Hinduism in 1935. Further, since the 1960s, there has been the growth of a vigorous Dalit consciousness and creativity in literature and art, drawing on the experiences of religious disabilities and widespread discrimination. In the 21st century, as we know, the terms of a Dalit politics are being carried forward through, for example, the claims of Dalit women, the forms of Dalit Christian theology, and mobilisations and campaigns for Dalit human rights, which adduce parallels between injustices of caste and wounds of race, not only in South Asia but in the Dalit diaspora and before a global public. My point is that the contending articulations of Dalit religions with ritual authority, caste hierarchy, and political power are attributes not only of the past but formative of the present.

19 Considering the emphasis on critical variations in these terrains, see Surinder S Jodhka (2004), also Grace Carswell (2013).

20 I shall not trivialise the embodied and affective, visceral and vital experience of *being* Dalit with scholarly references in this section. Instead, I wish to acknowledge my early intimations of such exclusion and inclusion as a child of anthropologist parents who were born Brahmins but acutely opposed caste in the vernacularly modern and provincial university town, Sagar, in central India. Later, such implications came alive in itineraries of fieldwork and archival research, but above all in the exact business of living. The anger and passion—embedded in words and expressed as images—of Savi Sawarkar sustain my writing.

21 These restrictions and exclusions derive not only from formations of purity–impurity but also those of ritual dominance of kingship and the dyad of the auspicious–inauspicious, variously tying in with processes of colonial cultures and postcolonial politics. Consider now why Dalits have not been allowed the use of umbrellas, palanquins (*palkis*), or elephants. After all, there is nothing that bespeaks purity and pollution in the case of these signifying objects. The point is that the umbrella is like a royal canopy, and the elephant is a regal mode of transport as is the palanquin. Here, the ritual dominance of kingship came together with

notions of the purity–pollution and auspicious–inauspicious in the shaping of caste and power. And so too, when the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) uses the elephant as its electoral symbol, this is not random, there is something profoundly symbolic and substantive about the challenge. Nor should it be surprising that, more than a 100 years before the BSP, the second Satnami Guru, cast as a conqueror, not only rode on an elephant but also wore a *janeu* (sacred thread) and affirmed his authority through colonial writing. This underscores my point about the intermeshing of purity–pollution (janeu), ritual kinship (elephant), and colonial power (imperial writing), now expressed through the challenge to these formations of meaning and power (Dube 1992). There are any number of other instances.

22 The wider implications of such displacements, negotiations, and interrogations are especially elaborated by Novetzke (2016).

23 Related emphasis are expressed by the popular religious formation of Mahima Dharma of Odisha (Banerjee-Dube 2007).

24 See, for instance, Lorenzen 1995; Lamb (2002) and Burghart (1996). See also, Novetzke (2016) and Hess (2015).

25 It bears emphasis that such patterns—from regional variations through to historical transformations and onto gendered distinctions—of Dalit religions within Hinduism also hold for other faiths. This includes the ways in which *ajlaf* Muslims, converted from Dalit and other lower castes, have distinctively understood and practised Islam, especially by vigorously participating in popular religious traditions, such as the cults of saints whose veneration cuts across religions. Similarly, the Dalits who became Sikh have created specific faiths that combine their understandings of the official doctrines and purity norms of Sikhism with popular practices of Hinduism and Islam. Finally, Dalit (and Adivasi) Christians have drawn on their membership of Orthodox and Protestant Churches to retain yet rework prior practices and wider principles of caste and worship as well as ritual and kinship, creating distinct forms of a religious identity and a vernacular Christianity, including novel representations and veneration of Hindu deities and Christian divinities where the one can complement but equally oppose the other. Joel Lee (2018) provides an able bibliography of the work on caste and Dalits in Indian Islam; on Dalit Sikhs see, for example, Raj Kumar Hans (2016); and on the terms of a Dalit Christianity see, for instance, Sathianathan Clarke (1998); Dube (2004); Dube (2010); and Zoe C Sherinian (2014).

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Landlessness and Agrarian Inequality without Landlordism

Caste, Class and Agrarian Structure in Bihar

GAURANG R SAHAY

An analysis of the agrarian structure in terms of caste and class, based on field data collected from 13 Bhojpuri-speaking villages in Bihar, reveals that villages exhibit a high level of landlessness and agrarian inequality but without landlordism. While all landholding households involve themselves in manual agricultural operations, they also employ free labour. Moreover, sharecropping is on the decline and reverse tenancy is slowly becoming the norm. These changing dynamics in the agrarian structure merit a closer examination of how caste and class function in the current day in the rural economy of villages in Bihar.

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The agricultural economy in India, which was stagnating throughout the latter part of the colonial period (Harriss 2013), remained almost in the same state during a couple of decades after independence. Daniel Thorner (1956) characterised this situation as "built-in depressor," which refers to the existence of landlords who have no incentive to invest in agriculture, while the peasants have no means to do so. The landlords leased out maximum amounts of their land to sharecroppers. The sharecroppers depended on the same landlords for loans at high rates of interest for the purpose of cultivating that land (Thorner 1956: 16). Consequently, agriculture remained stagnant.

The then ruling Congress party had recognised this condition in a report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee of 1949. Accordingly, land reform laws were enacted during the early 1950s to change the situation. But a review of these laws clearly indicates that these reforms did not bring about the end of "landlordism." Thorner's "depressor" continued to remain in place. Consequently, India continued to face the problem of food shortage. In the mid-1960s, this problem became extremely serious. It was in this context the government started adopting new agricultural strategies that included the green revolution, massive cash cropping, commercialisation and mechanisation for a significantly higher rate of agricultural growth. Indian agriculture also witnessed population growth-induced division of landholdings and went through the process of liberalisation. Now, there is a strong belief that such developments in agriculture have led to increasing fragmentation and consequently decreasing size of landholdings, and the weakening of sharecropping or tenancy.

Nonetheless, there are some significant studies that continue to claim that rural India is still characterised by landlordism (Breman 2007; Rawal 2008; Ramachandran et al 2010; Vakulabharanam et al 2011). Against such a background, this paper presents an understanding of the nature of the agrarian structure in terms of caste and class by focusing on the issues of landownership and landlessness, ownership of modern agricultural machinery, and the nature of agricultural labour and sharecropping on the basis of field data from the villages in Bihar.

Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture

Although the green revolution had a positive impact on the agrarian structure in terms of the productivity of foodgrains, increasing the level of income in the villages and increasing

real wages in agriculture and lowering food prices (Lipton and Longhurst 1989), the major beneficiaries were the rich peasants or big landlords. This is because though the green revolution was technically scale-neutral, it was not "resource-neutral." Such a development in Indian agriculture led to a debate among social scientists on the nature of the agrarian economy, which is widely known as "mode of production in Indian agriculture debate." The debate opened with a sample survey report on big farmers in Punjab by Ashok Rudra et al (1969). They denied the existence of capitalist farmers in Punjab (Rudra et al 1969). Utsa Patnaik (1971a) demolished the report by terming it "unhistorical." Patnaik (1971a, 1971b, 1972a, 1972b) observed that though the basic nature of agrarian economy was still non-capitalist, it had started exhibiting some features of capitalism and constituted a small but growing class of capitalist farmers.

Following the debate, scholars like Gail Omvedt (1981), Dipankar Gupta (1980), Jairus Banaji (1972, 1973, 1977), Jan Breman (1985), Joan Mencher (1974), John Harriss (1979, 1982), Kathleen Gough (1980) and Paresh Chattopadhyay (1972a, 1972b) highlighted the existence of capitalism in Indian agriculture being characterised by self-cultivation, monetisation, mechanisation, productivity orientation, propensity of profit, free wage labour, accumulation and investment in agriculture, increase in extraction of surplus value, generalised commodity production and the existence of a free market. They argued that there was no bonded labour or attached labour-based sharecropping in the agrarian economy, which are the hallmarks of feudalism or semi-feudalism. Differing somewhat from this position, Krishna Bharadwaj (1974) argued that though smallholding peasants became part of the process of commercialisation in the post-green revolution phase, it was a "compulsive involvement in markets" by them with an extremely weak bargaining position. So, it was a forced commercialisation with agrarian distress (Bharadwaj 1985).

Contrary to this thesis, there were some scholars, namely Amit Bhaduri (1973), Pradhan Prasad (1973, 1974), Nirmal Chandra (1974) and Ranjit Sau (1973, 1975, 1976), who argued that the agrarian economy in India was semi-feudal, that is, a system that has more in common with feudalism than capitalism. It is semi-feudal because it is characterised by landlordism and associated features like sharecropping, perpetual indebtedness of small tenants, concentration of two modes of exploitation (namely, usury and landownership in the hands of landlords), lack of accessibility to the market for the small tenants, pervasiveness of attached and underpaid labour, loans at exorbitant rates of interest, non-monetised wages, massive underemployment, determination of small peasants to continue cultivation no matter how meagre the returns, non-utilisation of resources for agricultural development and lack of accumulation of capital for investment in agriculture.

Meanwhile, a group of scholars, namely Donald Attwood, David Ludden, B B Chaudhuri, Meghnad Desai, Ronald Herring, Ashok Rudra, Llyod Rudolph, Sussane Rudolph and Sukhamoy Chakravarty refuted the semi-feudal thesis by demonstrating the commercialisation of agriculture and its unevenness across different regions of India and the variable relationship between power structures and productivity (Desai et al 1984). They agreed that the concentration of scarce resources in the hands of powerful agriculturalists encourages entrepreneurial risk-taking in agriculture. They believed that the classic inverse relationship between farm size and productivity no longer holds. The deployment of the surplus is crucial for agricultural productivity, and that the power structure determining the form of appropriation of surplus does not determine its deployment.

The scholars who argued for the emergence of a capitalist agrarian economy believed that the peasantry would be ultimately differentiated into two classes: capitalist farmers and proletariat peasants. But for Terry Byres (1981), the Indian agrarian economy was witnessing "partial proletarianisation" because small and marginal producers continue to reproduce themselves consistently because many of them work outside agriculture. Besides, it is still characterised by extensive family labour farms that are unlikely to provide "enough work or income to be the main livelihood of the household" (Hazell et al 2007).

This finding is substantiated by village surveys in Andhra Pradesh (AP), Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Maharashtra conducted by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies. It was argued that peasant households reproduce themselves now as a result of migration and increasing employment in the non-farm sector within the rural economy (Ramachandran and Rawal 2010; Basole and Basu 2011). The significance of labour migration in this respect is also highlighted by Gerry Rodgers and Janine Rodgers (2011) in their study of two Bihar villages, in Jan Breman's (2007) studies of the "footloose proletariat" of south Gujarat and in a restudy of a Tamil village by Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj (2010). Therefore, Henry Bernstein (2008) has argued that the dominance of capital today is no longer expressed in "classic" capital–labour relations. He suggests that "there are 'classes of labour' pursuing their reproduction through insecure and oppressive—and typically increasingly scarce—wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious small-scale and insecure 'informal sector' ('survival') activity, including farming" (quoted in Harriss 2013: 358). As a result, the differentiation and polarisation of peasant classes has nearly frozen.

Changing Patterns of Landownership

However, Vikas Rawal (2008), comparing the data from 1992 and 2003 National Sample Survey (NSS) rounds, suggests that there has been an increase of as much as 6 percentage points in landlessness, while inequality in landownership has also increased. Therefore, the differentiation of peasantry has not frozen. Besides, it has been observed that the increase in landlessness and inequality in landownership has further gone ahead with economic reforms because the cost of cultivation has phenomenally gone up along with a drastic decline in public investment in agriculture. For Rawal (2008), increasing landlessness is happening along with landlordism in rural India. Ramachandran et al (2010) and Vakulabharanam et al (2011) have also reported that in villages of coastal AP, absentee

landlordism and tenancy have been, in fact, increasing along with the persistence of the landed wealth and power of Reddys, Kammas and Kapus. Jan Breman (2007) has made a similar point in his study of Gandevigam, a Gujarat village. To quote him,

> the current generation of Kolis, who formerly were share-cropping tenants, would not be willing to subordinate themselves as sharecroppers. But in confidential conversations the Kolis clearly expressed their frustrations about the undiminished hegemony and obstinacy of the Anavil Brahmans, large farmers. They admit that there is little else they can do in the shadow of this higher caste. (Breman 2007: 37)

According to Harriss (2006), traces of classic landlordism have remained in Sahajapur, a West Bengal village. Jonathan Pattenden (2011: 164) argues that

> whilst traditional forms of control over the labouring class have been eroded, gatekeeping increasingly allows the dominant caste to exert more subtle forms of political control, which in turn facilitates processes of accumulation.

However, there are some studies that suggest that the introduction of land reforms and new agricultural strategies from the green revolution to contract farming and the phenomenal growth in population have stamped out landlordism from rural India. To quote Gupta (2005: 752),

> With the abolition of landlordism and the introduction of adult franchise ..., old social relations that dominated the country side are today in a highly emaciated form, when not actually dead. Roughly 85 per cent of landholdings are below five acres and about 63 per cent are below even three acres. What land reforms and land redistribution could not do, demography and subdivision of holdings have done to land ownership. Where are the big landlords? There are some, but they are few and far between.[1]

According to Harriss (2013), the share of leased-in land in the total operated area declined from only 10.7% in 1960–61 to just 6.5% in the kharif (summer) season of 2002–03.[2] This apart, Shashi Bhusan Singh (2005) argues that the decline of landlordism can also be substantiated by the decreasing importance of land as a factor of dominance in the villages. Jeffrey Witsoe (2011) reports that the income earned outside agriculture and outside the village has led to the emergence of multiple power centres replacing the dominance of the biggest landholding caste in the village, that is, the Rajputs. Alongside these developments, there has been the emergence of a new and very different generation of local leaders from amongst the educated but often unemployed younger men, including some from a Dalit background (Krishna 2003).

The Field and Fieldwork

The method of ethnography was used to collect field data from the villages constituting Unwas village panchayat of Buxar district of Bihar.[3] Ethnography is a processual and dynamic field-based/grounded inductive method that employs a range of standard research techniques of data collection (observations—participant and non-participant/overt or covert, interviews, focus groups, surveys, field "experiments," etc) singly or in combination to investigate social structures and processes and the meanings behind social interactions. The techniques of observation, both participant and non-participant, and interviews based on a questionnaire were used to collect data for this research work.

Given the intrusive nature of ethnography, the "trust" relationship between researchers and the researched was managed well during the fieldwork. Ways of showing respect for research subjects were embedded in the ways of seeing and observation and in both the content of research questions and the manner in which they were delivered. Using the method of ethnography, social structures and processes were examined in as natural a way as possible. The data collected were frequently descriptive. Unwas village panchayat has been my field of study for a long time. I started my fieldwork systematically in the panchayat in 2008, which is still continuing. The quantitative data that was presented in this paper was primarily collected in 2011, using an interview schedule.

The Unwas village panchayat comprises 13 Bhojpuri-speaking villages, including some small and almost single-caste settlements, namely Unwas, Bakasada, Parasi, Koch, Tajpur, Bishrampur, Bharchakia, Malhikawana, Gopinathpur, Kanpura, Mukundpur, Raghupur and Kesari Dera. All the villages are situated in close proximity to each other, within a radius of roughly 4 kilometres (km). They are situated approximately 17–20 km south of Buxar, a district town. The panchayat represents most of the castes found in the Bhojpuri-speaking area of Bihar. Apart from a sizeable Muslim community, there are 28 castes in the panchayat. Five of them (Chamar, Dhobi, Dom, Dusadh and Netua) belong to the category of Scheduled Castes (SCs).[4] There are, however, 18 backward castes[5] as well, such as Bari, Bhar, Bind, Bania (Kalwar, Kanu and Teli) Gaderia, Gond, Kamkar, Koeri, Kohar, Kurmi, Lohar, Nau, Nonia, Paneri, Rajbhar, Sonar, Tatwa, and Yadav. In addition, there are Brahmins, Bhumihars, Kayasthas, Mahabrahmins and Rajputs, who constitute the forward caste category.[6] In terms of household numbers, the Koeris constitute the most populous caste, followed by the Yadav, Chamar, Brahmin, Muslim, Nonia, Kamkar, Kanu, Rajput, Teli, Bhar, Lohar, Bind, Kurmi, Sonar, Kohar, Kalwar, Gond, Nau, Dusadh, Gaderia, Rajbhar, Dhobi, Kayastha, Bari, Mahabrahmin, Netua, Paneri, Bhumihar, Dom and Tatwa castes, in that order.

Unwas, Bakasada, Parasi and Koch are bigger villages inhabited by a good number of castes. The other nine villages are inhabited by a few castes or a single caste. Like the forward castes, most SCs reside in Unwas, Bakasada, Parasi and Koch, whereas the other nine villages are predominantly populated by backward castes, particularly the Koeris and the Yadavs. Forward castes, namely the Brahmins and the Rajputs, are economically dominant in Unwas, Parasi and Koch villages, particularly in terms of ownership of land. In the other 10 villages, the Koeris or Yadavs, as the biggest landholding castes, are economically quite strong. Almost all the Muslims of the panchayat reside in Bakasada and Unwas. They lead their lives in a manner similar to a caste group, and the villagers refer to them as Muslim jati (caste).

Among all the villages, Unwas is the biggest village in terms of area, size of population, and caste composition. Residents of nearby villages come to Unwas to avail transportation,

medical facilities, postal facilities—including the telephone—educational facilities, and to shop for basic goods. It is the only village in the panchayat to have a high school and a post office. That is why the panchayat has been named Unwas village panchayat. I stayed in Unwas as an anthropological observer and visited other villages of the panchayat from time to time.

Caste, Class and Landownership

Since the villages under study are predominantly agrarian, land is the most valuable and sought-after means of production. In the villages, the amount of land (2,941 acres) is quite limited in relation to the number of households (1,390 households) (Table 1); the average landownership is around two acres per household.[7] The pattern of landownership is highly unequal in terms of both class and caste. Following the conceptualisation by V Lenin and Mao Zedong and many others, we can classify villagers into five distinct agrarian classes based on landholdings. Table 1 shows that the class of landless and near landless people is the biggest class in terms of size, consisting of 841 households or 60.5% of the total households. In this class, there are 463 households that are landless and the remaining 378 households own one acre or less. Altogether they own only 6.6% of the total land.

The class of small peasants consists of 255 households or 18.3% of the total households. The households belonging to this class own more than one acre but not more than three acres. This class owns 15.7% of the total land. The average size of landholding per household within this class is 1.8 acres. The class of lower-middle peasants is made up of 225 households or 16.2% of the total households. A lower-middle peasant household owns more than three acres but not more than nine acres. It has ownership over 37.9% of the total land. Average ownership of land per household within this class is 4.95 acres. The class of upper-middle peasants is made up of only 38 households or 2.7% of the households but they own 14.6% of the land. The households belonging to this class own more than nine acres but not more than 15 acres. The average size of landholding per household within this class is 11.28 acres.

The smallest agrarian class is the class of large peasants consisting of 31 households or 2.2% of the total households. The households belonging to this class own more than 15 acres. The average ownership of land per household within this class is 23.9 acres. However, this class has ownership over 25.2% of the total land. Thus, the classes of upper-middle peasants and large peasants together own 39.8% of the total land but represent only 4.9% of the households. On the other hand, the classes of landless and near landless and small peasants, which represent 78.8% of the households, own only 22.3% of the total land.

Table 2 presents data on the ownership of land by various castes. Out of 28 castes and a Muslim community, four castes—Brahmins, Koeris, Rajputs, Yadavs—in all own 2,477.4 acres or 84.2% of the total land. Brahmins, Koeris, Rajputs and Yadavs constitute 8.8%, 20.6%, 3.1% and 14.7% of the households respectively, but own 24.2%, 22.1%, 8.7%, and 29.3% of the total land respectively. In other words, the 656 households of these four castes, constituting only 47.2% of the total households, own 84.2% of the total land. Besides, all 31 households except three who own more than 15 acres of land belong to these four castes. There are five castes—Bhars, Doms, Netuas, Paneris and Tatwas—who own no land at all, and five other castes—Baris, Dhobis, Gonds, Gaderias and Sonars—are nearly landless.

The fact that the Yadavs are the biggest landholding caste should not be construed to mean that all Yadav households own land. Seventeen Yadavs are landless and 41 Yadav households are quite close to landlessness. Similarly, other big

Table 1: Agrarian Class and Landownership

Class	Number of Households	Size of Landholding (in Acres) per Household	Land (in Acres)	Average Size of Landholding (in Acres)
Landless and near landless people	841 (60.5)	0–1	195.5 (6.6)	0.23
Small peasants	255 (18.3)	1–3	461 (15.7)	1.8
Lower-middle peasants	225 (16.2)	3–9	1,113.8 (37.9)	4.95
Upper-middle peasants	38 (2.7)	9–15	428.5 (14.6)	11.28
Large peasants	31 (2.2)	15 and above	742.2 (25.2)	23.9
Total	1,390		2,941	2.1

The land size category excludes the lowest point and includes the highest point.
Source: Field data and official records.

Table 2: Caste and Landownership

Caste	Number of Households	Land (in Acres)	Distribution of Caste-based Households in Terms of Ownership over Size of Landholding						
			Landless	0–1 Acre	1–3 Acres	3–6 Acres	6–9 Acres	9–15 Acres	Above 15 Acres
Bania	94 (6.8)	81.7 (2.8)	38	38	11	4	2	0	1
Bari	7 (0.5)	1 (0.03)	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Bhar	34 (2.4)	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bhumihar	1 (0.07)	1.4(0.04)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Brahmin	123(8.8)	711.1(24.2)	6	19	33	24	21	10	10
Bind	32 (2.3)	42.8 (1.5)	8	13	8	1	0	2	0
Chamar	165(11.9)	44.7(1.5)	107	48	5	4	0	1	0
Dhobi	8 (0.6)	1 (0.03)	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
Dom	1 (0.07)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dusadh	10 (0.7)	10 (0.3)	4	4	1	0	1	0	0
Gaderia	10 (0.7)	5.9 (0.2)	3	5	2	0	0	0	0
Gond	14 (1)	0.5 (0.01)	11	3	0	0	0	0	0
Kamkar	45 (3.2)	30 (1)	21	12	10	2	0	0	0
Kayastha	8 (0.6)	30.6 (1)	2	0	4	1	0	0	1
Koeri	286(20.6)	650.2(22.1)	44	100	71	42	16	8	5
Kohar	16 (1.2)	15.6 (0.5)	8	1	5	2	0	0	0
Kurmi	19 (1.4)	48.3 (1.6)	5	3	5	4	0	1	1
Lohar	33 (2.4)	13.3 (0.5)	14	14	4	1	0	0	0
Maha-brahmin	7 (0.5)	6.3 (0.2)	3	0	4	0	0	0	0
Nau	14 (1.0)	8.4 (0.3)	4	8	2	0	0	0	0
Netua	5 (0.4)	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nonia	82 (5.9)	40.6 (1.4)	45	23	12	2	0	0	0
Paneri	4 (0.3)	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rajbhar	9 (0.6)	10.2 (0.3)	4	1	3	0	1	0	0
Rajput	43 (3.1)	254.7 (8.7)	3	2	14	11	4	4	5
Sonar	17 (1.2)	3.4 (0.1)	11	6	0	0	0	0	0
Tatwa	1 (0.07)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yadav	204(14.7)	861.4(29.3)	17	41	52	51	23	12	8
Muslim	98 (7.05)	67.8 (2.3)	53	29	8	5	3	0	0
Total	1,390	2,941	463	378	255	154	71	38	31

The land size category excludes the lowest point and includes the highest point. The category of Muslim has also been included in the table.
Source: Field data and official records.

landholding castes like the Brahmins, Koeris and Rajputs too have a number of households that are either landless or quite close to being landless.

Landlords and Tenancy

The data clearly show that majority of the households hardly own land, and a very small percentage of households have the largest share of landownership. However, there are no landlords in the villages as defined by Lenin, Zedong and other scholars. To quote Lenin (1965: 152–64), the landlords

> directly or through their tenant farmers—systematically exploit wage-labour and the neighbouring small (and, not infrequently, part of the middle) peasantry, do not themselves engage in manual labour, and are in the main descended from the feudal lords.

According to Zedong (1967: 137–39),

> A Landlord is a person who owns land, does not engage in labour himself, or does so only to a very small extent, and lives by exploiting the peasants. The collection of land rent is his main form of exploitation; in addition, he may lend money, hire labour, or engage in industry or commerce. But his exaction of land rent from the peasants is his principal form of exploitation.

Following such conceptualisations, Ramachandran et al (2010: 24) opine that "Landlord families are, in general, historical participants in the system of land monopoly in the village." For them, landlord households do not participate manually in cultivation operations: "Their land is cultivated by tenants, to whom land is leased out on a fixed rent or share, or by means of the labour power of hired workers" (Ramachandran et al 2010: 24). Since capitalist farmers also do not involve themselves manually in cultivation operations, Ramachandran et al (2010: 24) argue, while referring to the great Marxist leader E M S Namboodiripad, that "The main difference between … capitalist farmers and landlords is that the former did not traditionally belong to the class of landlords." Harriss (2013: 352) believes that, historically, landlordism means

> the concentration of economic power in the rural economy in the hands of a small number of very large landholders, often absentees, who held sway over what was often a hierarchy of tenants with varying degrees of security of tenure.

By extracting value from the land (rent) but not spending or reinvesting in the local community, absentee landlords produce an outward flow of economic capital. The landlords are primarily interested in extracting rent from tenants and pay little or no regard to the state of the land or the welfare—economic, social or political—of the persons who are paying the rent. For them land is simply a source of profit and power. Such an understanding of landlordism is very similar to the idea of "built-in depressor" by Thorner (1956: 16).

The idea of built-in depressor is based on a study of the village of Sahajapur, in Bhirbhum district of West Bengal, in 1955–56, by the Agro-Economic Research Centre for Eastern India (Bhattacharjee 1958). Four out of 133 households in Sahajapur owned about 60% of all the land. Almost all the land owned by these four households was leased out to sharecroppers for cultivation. The sharecroppers depended substantially on the same four landowners for loans that attracted very high rates of interest. These four households accounted for a very large share of all the paddy sales from the village too. The landlords had no incentive to invest; the impoverished peasant masses were left with no means of investment (Harriss 2013: 352). These are the agrarian relations that were modelled around 20 years later by Bhaduri (1973), Prasad (1973, 1974) and Sau (1973, 1975, 1976) as "semi-feudalism."

As it has been already stated, there are only 31 households in the villages under study that own more than the official ceiling of landholding, that is, 15 acres of land. Out of them, eight households in Unwas and six households in Gopinathpur own more than 15 acres but not more than 43.75 acres. Five of them are from Parasi village and they own 15.62–22.81 acres. Three such households belong to the village Bakasada and they own 18.75–25 acres. Koch and Malhikawana both consist of three such households. Bishrampur and Bharchakia consist of two and one such households owning just above 15 acres respectively. Twenty-eight of these 31 households belong to only four castes: Brahmins, Yadavs, Koeris and Rajputs. As it has been mentioned, Brahmins and Rajputs are forward castes and Yadav and Koeri belong to the backward caste category.

However, these 31 households cannot be classified as the households of landlords because members of all such households involve themselves manually or physically in agricultural operations. Besides, majority of them have not been big landholding households historically. Many of them acquired land after independence. These households are socially, emotionally or physically attached to the land that they own. They try their best to increase their landholding. They are found to be the major investors in agriculture. They are the main cultivators in villages and majority of them do not lease out their land to sharecroppers at all. Therefore, they do not exploit poor peasants or agricultural labour by appropriating rents through the institution of sharecropping.

In fact, there is reverse tenancy in the villages. Many of these 31 households are found to take land on lease. There is an institution of moneylending in the villages, but there are many moneylenders in the villages who do not belong to these households. The later section of this paper reveals that there is no bonded labour in the villages, which should have been the case if there was landlordism in the villages. The formally free character of both daily wage and attached agricultural labour, along with the declining power of caste hierarchies (Sahay 2004), dispersal of power among major castes (Sahay 2009) and the reduced significance of the village as a social entity in present-day India (Gupta 2005) have contributed significantly to the absence of landlordism and the associated extra-economic coercion or exploitation in the social formation of the villages. There is concentration of land in the villages, but the concentration is not as high as it was in Sahajapur village, the source of the built-in depressor thesis. This apart, almost all the households that own more than 15 acres are big in their size. The biggest household among them is also the biggest landholder. If they are divided into small or nuclear units, there will hardly be a household left in the villages owning more than 15 acres of land.

Agricultural Machinery and Fertiliser Use

Land-based inequality is deeply correlated with the inequality pertaining to the ownership of modern agricultural machinery, such as the pumpset, thresher, tractor and harvester. It has been observed that the households, which own more than six acres, irrespective of their caste affiliation, are the main owners of modern agricultural machinery. Since big landholding households generally belong to Brahmins, Koeris, Rajputs and Yadavs, these four castes are the major owners. The chief crops in the villages under study are paddy, wheat, pulses and mustard. For growing these crops, the villagers use chemical fertilisers. The use of natural fertiliser has declined drastically in recent years.

On an average, the villagers use 175 kilograms (kg) of chemical fertilisers per acre of land per year. The upper-middle peasants and large peasants use more fertilisers per acre of land as they have better resources. The differences in the quantity of chemical fertilisers used by various castes or households are generally due to differences in the size of the land they cultivate. Thus, the households that cultivate more land use more fertilisers. The increasing dependence of the farmers on chemical fertilisers and modern machinery has intensified the relations of their villages with the outside world.

Agricultural work, that is, preparing the fields for different crops, sowing seeds, transplanting seedlings, trimming or removing weeds, applying fertiliser, harvesting and threshing of crops, etc, does not require modern skills, knowledge or inventiveness. Even those who drive tractors and operate modern machinery do so without going through any special training. Driving and operating a harvester requires trained and skilled workers, who come to the villages during the harvesting season from other regions, particularly from Punjab. This is because the use of harvesters is a recent phenomenon in the villages and the local people have not yet been trained to operate this machine.

Caste, Class and Labour Power

Since there is a prevalence of family labour farms among the classes of near landless people, small peasants and lower-middle peasants, the number of households who do not hire labour significantly for their agricultural work is much higher. The households that use purchased labour power significantly largely belong to the classes of upper-middle peasants and large peasants. It has been observed that the number of households which use less purchased labour power and more household labour power is higher. There is hardly a household in the villages that gets agricultural work done completely by purchased labour. Except for a few minor and landless castes, such as Gonds, Doms, Netuas, Tatwas and Baris, all other castes hire labour for agricultural work. The Banias, Brahmins, Kayasthas and Rajputs get their agricultural work done more by purchased labour and less by household labour. Other castes and the Muslim community get their agricultural work done more by their own labour and less by purchased labour.

There are only two types of labour in the villages—daily-wage labour and attached labour. The difference between the two relates to the duration of the contract that exists between the sellers and buyers of labour power. The contract between the daily-wage labourer and the buyer of labour power lasts for a single day, whereas the contract between the attached labourer and the buyer of labour power lasts for six months or a year. The daily-wage labourers generally get their wages paid in cash (₹250 for about eight hours of work) every day, whereas the attached labourers get their wages paid in the form of cultivable land and grain. They get land in the beginning of the contract and grain during the contract whenever they work. Taken together, the wage-rate of attached labour hardly varies from the wage-rate of daily-wage labour.

Both daily-wage and attached labour are free wage labour, as the labourers are free to decide when, where and to whom they will sell their labour power and for how much. Bonded labour of any kind, including debt-based bonded labour, was not reported in the villages. I also could not come across a household which supplied labour power only to a particular family. Like hiring in labour power, hiring out labour power is closely related with the class position of the households. Almost all landless and near landless households and majority of the small peasant households sell labour power. Majority of them supply only daily-wage labour. Those households who supply attached labour also supply daily-wage labour.

Concerning caste and selling labour power, 21 out of 28 castes and the Muslim community sell their labour power in the villages. The Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, Kayasthas, Doms, Naus and Sonars do not sell labour power. The Naus, Sonars and Doms are fully engaged in their traditional caste occupations. The Chamars have the highest number of households that sell labour power, and they are followed by the Nonias, Bhars, Koeris, Gonds, Dusadhs, Kamkars, Banias, Kohars, Yadavs, Lohars, Rajbhars, Dhobis, Baris, Paneris, Mahabrahmins and Kayasthas, in that order. These castes supply more daily wage labour than attached labour. There are a good number of castes such as Banias, Rajbhars, Dhobis, Lohars and Mahabrahmins that supply only daily-wage labour. There is no household in the villages that supplies only attached labour.

Thus, there is a positive correlation between selling labour power and landlessness. The castes that own more land or more percentage of land in comparison to the percentage of their households constitute lesser number of households in percentage terms that sell labour power. This apart, most of the households that sell labour power belong to the backward castes category, closely followed by those belonging to the SC category. Lastly, there has been a decreasing demand for hired labour in agriculture primarily because of the predominance of small or family labour farms and mechanisation of agriculture in the villages. Even the bigger or larger peasants who hire daily wage labour for agricultural work hire them for less than one and a half months in a year. That is why many labourers in the villages are found to be mainly and gainfully employed in the non-farm sector within and outside villages. Rural non-farm employment is a growing incidence.

Caste, Class and Sharecropping

Those who take land on lease for cultivation are called sharecroppers or *assami* in local Bhojpuri language. In the villages

there are three types of sharecropping. The first type, called *batai*, involves those who take land on lease and pay half of the produce to the owner of the land. The second type of sharecropping, called *mani*, involves those who pay a fixed amount of grain after harvesting the first crop, that is, paddy. How much the sharecropper must pay is finalised before he takes the land on lease. A sharecropper generally pays around 1,400 kg of paddy per acre. If the crop is adversely affected because of natural calamities, such as drought or flood, the amount of payment is negotiated afresh. The third type of sharecropping, called *malgujari*, involves those who pay the rent in cash at the time of taking the land on lease. In the case of any natural calamities, the owner of the land does not return even a part of the rent to the sharecropper. A sharecropper generally pays around ₹15,000 per acre as rent. The duration of all these three types of contracts is one year, after which a fresh contract is made.

Around 15% of the total land is leased out in the villages.[8] Most of the landowning castes lease out some part of their land to the sharecroppers. The Brahmins were found to lease out more land than other castes. In this, the Brahmins are followed by the Koeris, Yadavs, Rajputs, Kayasthas and Banias. Other castes and the Muslim community have either no share or a very small share in the total leased-out land. Thus, those castes that own a higher percentage of the total land have a larger share in the total leased-out land in percentage terms. It was observed that only the Brahmins, Rajputs and Kayasthas together lease out a higher percentage of land than the percentage of households they represent in the villages. Taking land on lease is a general phenomenon in the villages. All castes, except a few minor castes such as the Bhumihars and Lohars, take land on lease. The Brahmins, Koeris, Yadavs and Nonias are the major shareholders in the land taken on lease. Among the SCs, the Chamars take substantial plots of land on lease. Thus, all the major castes are also the major shareholders in the total land taken on lease.

It is also important to note that taking land on lease is neither positively nor negatively correlated with the ownership of land in the villages. Due to the higher rent to be paid on the leased-out land, the poor or landless households are increasingly getting out of this practice. Generally, the households that take land on lease are capable of paying rent in the beginning and even after low agricultural production. This apart, there are also a good number of households, which take those plots of land on lease that are attached to their own major land, because that makes the cultivation of such land and their own land easier and more profitable. This is a case of reverse tenancy that is increasingly becoming a major pattern in the agrarian relations in the villages. That is why the main landholding castes in the villages are also the major shareholders in the land taken on lease.[9] Overall, sharecropping is a declining phenomenon in the villages.

Conclusions

I would like to conclude this paper by reiterating some of the significant facts or observations from the villages. In the villages, majority of the households hardly own land, and a very small percentage of households have the largest share in landownership. Land-based inequality is deeply correlated with the high inequality pertaining to the ownership of the pumpset, thresher, tractor and harvester. Most of the land and modern agricultural machinery are owned by Brahmins and Rajputs (forward castes) and Koeris and Yadavs (backward castes). The SCs hardly own any land and modern agricultural machinery. However, the facts clearly exhibit that a high level of land-based or agrarian inequality is not accompanied by the existence of landlords in the villages.

Most of the households that are involved in cultivation buy labour power at certain points of time in a year. Thus, buying labour power for agricultural work is not confined to a few castes. There is a positive correlation between selling labour power and landlessness. Most of the households that sell labour power belong to the backward castes category, closely followed by those belonging to the SC category. Most of the landowning castes lease out some part of their land to the sharecroppers. However, sharecropping is a declining phenomenon in the villages. Due to the higher rent to be paid on the leased-out land, the landless or poor households are increasingly getting out of this practice. It is the landholding households that are gradually becoming the main sharecroppers in the villages. This case of reverse tenancy is increasingly becoming a major pattern in the agrarian relations in the villages. There is a growing increase in the number of those who work in non-agricultural operations.

NOTES

1 The 10th Agricultural Census 2015–16 has also indicated the decreasing size of large landholdings in the country. The census reveals that the share of small and marginal landholdings, that is, between zero and two hectares, has risen to 86.21% of total operational holdings in 2015–16 as against 84.97% in 2010–11. On the other hand, the share of semi-medium and medium operational landholdings, that is, two to 10 hectares, dropped from 14.29% in 2010–11 to 13.22% in 2015–16, and that of large landholdings, that is, 10 hectares and above, fell from 0.71% in 2010–11 to 0.57% in 2015–16. The census states that the average size of farmland in 2015–16 is 1.08 as against 1.15 hectares in 2010–11.

2 There is no consistency in the share of leased-in land in the total operated area. The estimates of last five NSS surveys vis-à-vis the share of leased-in land in the total operated area are 10.57% in 1970–71, 7.18% in 1981–82, 8.52% in 1991–92, 6.50% in 2002–03 and 11.3% in 2012–13.

3 Buxar district is situated in the south-west part of Bihar. A village panchayat in the state generally consists of more than one village.

4 The Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936, specified a number of castes as SCs. Independent India, through the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, accepted the existing category of SCs, and published a revised SCs list. The order defined the category as consisting of those castes that were associated with the most impure work and menial labour with no possibility of upward mobility, and were subjected to severe social exclusion and disadvantages, in comparison to the other castes.

5 The term backward caste signifies those castes that have been categorised as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by constitutional provision. It consists of those castes that were in the past subjected to exclusions and, therefore, remained socially and educationally backward, despite having a higher position than the SCs in the caste hierarchy. The Government of India made the category operational throughout the country from 1990.

6 People in the villages use the term forward caste to signify those castes that do not belong to either the SC or the OBC category. Though the term is not a constitutional or official category, it is widely used by villagers.

7 The data pertaining to landholdings was collected during the fieldwork, which was verified on the basis of landholding records available in the block development offices.

8 According to the NSS surveys, the percentage of tenant holding was 19.7 in 1981–82, 5.6 in 1991–92, 12.7 in 2002–03, and 28 in 2012–13 and the percentage share of leased-in operated area was 10.3 in 1981–82, 3.9 in 1991–92, 8.9 in 2002–03 and 21.6 in 2012–13 in Bihar.

9 This fact is corroborated by the report of the 70th round of NSS titled "Household Ownership and Operational Holdings in India" (NSSO 2013–14). The survey points out that the landless class shows the lowest incidence of tenancy (2.6%) and the highest percentage of tenancy is seen among large landholding households (21.8%). The incidence of tenancy is 13.2%, 13.6%, 18.0% and 14.8% among marginal, small, semi-medium and medium landholding households respectively.

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Labour Market Changes in India, 2005–18

Missing the Demographic Window of Opportunity?

JAYAN JOSE THOMAS

Unemployment among the young increased sharply as the gap between labour absorption and labour supply widened in India during 2012–18. During this period, the non-agricultural sectors—industry, construction and services–were unable to absorb the rising supply of young adults who were potential job seekers. The growth of rural incomes and rural construction jobs slowed down and manufacturing employment declined by one million jobs. Women responded to the labour supply—demand mismatch by withdrawing from the labour market altogether. The jobs crisis among men aged 15 to 29 years was acute, as they comprised 68.3% of all the unemployed in India in 2018.

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Unemployment has become a subject of intense political discussions in India. Particularly so since February 2019, when it emerged that the unemployment rate had reached an all-time high of 6.1%, according to the then as-yet-unpublished Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) (Thomas 2019a). Before this, unemployment had not figured so prominently in public debates in India, to the extent that it does in middle-to-high income countries (Basole and Jayadev 2019).

One of the reasons why unemployment remained a less noticeable issue was because the official rates of unemployment in India were quite low. They were low enough to put many developed countries to shame, quipped Amartya Sen in a monograph he wrote in 1975 (Sen 1999 [1975]: 119). Unemployment rate in India was only 2.2%, according to the National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) employment and unemployment survey held during 2011–12, which was the latest officially available major employment statistics before the PLFS was released in May 2019. As Sen (1999) notes, the low rates of unemployment in India were partly on account of the way employment and unemployment were measured. A person who does no job but occasionally—as little as one hour of work for 30 days in a year—assists in their family-owned farm could still be categorised as a worker, as per the country's official employment statistics.

The Indian economy and the labour market have been undergoing significant structural shifts, and these have had impacts on employment statistics as well. First, there has been an expansion in the size of the working-age population. Second, enrolment of young adults in educational institutions has been rising markedly, and third, there has been a gradual movement of rural workers away from agriculture due to both "push" and "pull" factors. Young persons in rural areas are increasingly anxious to escape from "disguised unemployment" in agriculture.

Labour Supply and Demand Gap

Given such a context, a key question addressed in this article is whether the rate of growth of labour demand in the non-agricultural sectors—in industry, construction and services—has been rapid enough to absorb the rising supply of young adults who are potential job seekers. Our research shows that this has not been so in India since the mid-2000s onwards. Labour demand from sectors other than agriculture lagged far behind potential labour supply in the case of women, resulting in a sharp decline in workforce participation rate or worker population ratio (WPR) among females (Table 1). After 2012, the gulf between labour supply and labour demand deepened, and it affected not only women but also men, leading to a marked increase in unemployment rate among young men.

The analysis in this article is based on official data on employment and

Table 1: Distribution of Male and Female Population in India by Activity Status, 2004–05 to 2017–18 (%)

	Males			Females		
	2004–05	2011–12	2017–18	2004–05	2011–12	2017–18
Population	100	100	100	100	100	100
Distribution of population, all ages						
Labour force	56.0	55.6	55.6	28.9	22.1	17.4
Employed	54.7	54.4	52.1	28.1	21.6	16.4
Unemployed	1.3	1.2	3.5	0.8	0.5	1.0
Students	26.4	29.6	28.5	22.2	25.2	24.6
Engaged in domestic duties	0.4	0.3	0.8	31.7	38.7	44.4
Distribution of population, aged 15–59 years						
Employed	84.9	80.6	74.5	42.8	31.2	23.0
Unemployed	2.1	2.0	5.6	1.3	0.9	1.7

Source: NSSO (2006, 2014) and NSO (2019).

unemployment in India—mainly the surveys conducted by the NSSO during its 2004–05 and 2011–12 rounds and the PLFS carried out during 2017–18. The NSSO surveys and PLFS used broadly similar methodologies and sample sizes, and are, therefore, comparable with each other.

The NSSO employment surveys and the PLFS have been conducted over a one-year-period, typically from July of one year to June of the succeeding year (the recent PLFS was carried out between July 2017 and June 2018). Estimates of employment for the middle of each survey year (that is, for instance, January 2018, for the survey held between July 2017 and June 2018) were made by multiplying WPRs obtained from the survey with the projection, based on the census, of population at that particular point in time. All estimates in this article, unless otherwise specified, are based on the usual principal and usual subsidiary status (UPSS) of workers. In January 2018, out of a total estimated population of 1,358 million, there were 471.5 million who were employed, 30.9 million unemployed, and 361.4 million students. There were also 299 million persons, most of them women, who reported their status as attending to domestic duties, and were, therefore, not part of the labour force (Table 2).

The next section deals with demographic changes and aspects of labour supply in India. The section after that analyses the growth of labour demand, followed by an examination of how labour demand corresponded with potential labour supply in the case of women and men as well as the old and young. The article concludes by reflecting on these findings and the implications for India's demographic dividend.

Table 2: Distribution of India's Population by Activity Status, Estimates for January 2018

(million)

	Males	Females	Persons
1 Population	696.2	661.8	1,358.0
2 Labour force (3+4)	387.1	115.3	502.4
3 Employed	363.0	108.5	471.5
4 Unemployed	24.1	6.8	30.9
5 Students	198.6	162.8	361.4
6 Engaged in domestic duties	5.4	293.6	299.0
Labour participation rate (2 as % 1)	55.6	17.4	37.0
Workforce participation rate (3 as % 1)	52.1	16.4	34.7
Unemployment rate (4 as % of 2)	6.2	5.9	6.1

Source: Estimates based on NSO (2019) and Census of India.

Demography and Labour Supply

It is important for India that it translates the demographic "window of opportunity" into favourable outcomes in economic growth. In China's case, a sharp decline in fertility rates along with an increase in the working-age population occurred from the 1970s onwards. Between 1980 and 1990 (or the 1980s), China's population aged 15–59 years grew by 171.1 million, or at an average rate of 17.1 million a year. Compared with China, the decline in fertility rate in India has been a far slower and a more gradual process. By the 2000s, India had overtaken China with respect to the growth of the working-age population, with average annual rates of 14.0 million and 10.9 million respectively for the two countries. The World Bank estimates that the size of China's working-age population will shrink between 2010 and 2020, and the decline will get steeper over the coming decades. On the contrary, the size of the working-age population in India will continue getting bigger until 2050 (Table 3).

Thus, the demographic structure in India offers it some advantages over China in economic growth over the coming years. Nevertheless, India too, like China, faces the dim prospect of "growing old before getting rich" (Cai 2016: 72). Estimates by the World Bank show that, from 2020 onwards, the population of the young will begin to decline in India, while the growth will be increasingly faster for the older age groups. During the 2020s (between 2020 and 2030) itself, population in the age group of 0 to 29 years will decline by 8.9 million in India, whereas population aged 30 years or older will increase by 138.7 million (World Bank 2019).

Table 3: Size of Population Aged 15–59 Years, India and China, 1960–2050

(million)

Year	Size of Population, 15–59 Years		Net Increase in 15–59 Population over the Decade that Ended	
	India	China	India	China
1960	244.6	356.5	–	–
1970	296.7	440.5	52.1	84.0
1980	382.5	564.2	85.8	123.7
1990	486.7	735.3	104.2	171.1
2000	614.7	836.9	128.0	101.6
2010	754.6	945.9	139.9	109.1
2020	876.1	908.9	121.5	-21.7
2030	967.7	839.5	91.6	-69.4
2040	1,021.3	777.6	53.6	-62.0
2050	1,029.4	682.9	8.1	-94.7

Source: United Nations (2017) for population data from 1950 to 2010. World Bank (2019) for population projections from 2020 to 2050.

Enrolment in Educational Institutions

There has been considerable improvement in enrolment in educational institutions in India from the 2000s onwards, and this has had significant impacts both on the size and the nature of labour supply. Students do not form part of the labour force. Therefore, as greater numbers of young adults start attending educational institutions, there will be a corresponding decline in the size of the labour force.

A significant increase in the proportion of students to population (all ages) (by 3 percentage points or more) was one of the reasons for the decline in male as well as female WPR in India between 2004–05 and 2011–12. However, the proportion of students to population declined in India between 2011–12 and 2017–18, from 29.6% to 28.5% in the case of males, and from 25.2% to 24.6% in the case of females (Table 1). This could be mainly due to a slowing down of the growth of the young population—who are in the school- or college-going years—compared to the growth of the older population. Therefore, an increase in the proportion of students to population is not one of the reasons for the decline in WPRs in India between 2011–12 and 2017–18, unlike the case during the period between 2004–05 and 2011–12.

The supply of a well-educated workforce has been crucial to the successes achieved by South Korea and other East Asian countries in late industrialisation. At the same time, it needs to be noted that enrolment in educational institutions does not necessarily translate into the skills and knowledge that constitute human capital. The *World Development Report 2018* points out how poor learning achievements of students in many developing countries undermine the progress achieved by these countries in school enrolment (World Bank 2018).

Despite India's recent achievements with respect to enrolment in education (reported earlier), there have been serious concerns about adequacy of teachers, infrastructure, and learning outcomes of pupils in a large number of schools and colleges across the country. The Annual Status of Education Report's (ASER) surveys from 2008 onwards show that learning outcomes in Indian schools have actually worsened over time (ASER 2019). Leaders of Indian industry have been expressing concern about a serious shortage of workers with the necessary skills in various fields. At the same time, the nature of labour supply in India is being fundamentally altered with the growing numbers of people who have spent a few years in a school or college and who have greater aspirations for securing a regular job with a decent pay.

Changes in Labour Demand

How has labour demand in India responded to the challenges thrown up by the growing size and changing nature of labour supply? As is now widely agreed, investment and incomes grew at fast rates in India for around five years after the introduction of economic reforms in 1991–92. However, subsequently the economy entered a phase of stagnation that lasted between 1997–98 and 2002–03. The tide changed from 2003 onwards, as the Indian economy witnessed an unprecedented boom, powered by private corporate investment, a rise in domestic savings, and a highly favourable external environment. Nevertheless, the so-called "dream run" in India's economic growth began to falter after 2008, with the onset of the crisis in the world economy (Table 4; also see Nagaraj 2013).

Compared to the economic boom during the second half of the 2000s, India's economy has clearly been showing signs of a deceleration after 2011–12, particularly with respect to investment. Gross capital formation as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) was 39.5% in 2012–13, but this ratio declined to 33.5% by 2016–17.[1] India's exports have slowed down too, with the regression in global demand conditions. Although India continues to retain the distinction of being one of the fastest-growing large economies in the world, it faces vulnerabilities in many areas, including agriculture, the informal sector, and a debt-ridden banking system.

Agricultural employment and the rural economy: WPRs observed in a particular round of NSSO's employment survey (or in the recent PLFS) reflect the effects of long-term structural changes in the economy as well as the short-run impacts of some specific conditions (such as a drought or flood) that might have emerged at the time the survey had been held. When the NSSO surveys were held in 1999–2000 and 2004–05, India's rural economy had been going through a severe crisis, characterised by a dip in public investment and stagnation in the growth of agricultural incomes and rural wages. Farmer suicides had been reported from various regions across the country. The NSSO surveys confirmed that employment growth in India decelerated sharply during the 1990s (between 1993–94 and 1999–2000) compared to the 1980s (between 1983 and 1993–94) (Thomas 2015).

Despite the continuing stagnation in the growth of rural incomes, industrial and services sectors in India had begun to stage a revival at the time the NSSO conducted its employment survey in 2004–05. Between 1999–2000 and 2004–05, non-agricultural employment increased impressively in the country (by 41.9 million). At the same time, 2004–05 was a year of deficient rainfall, and some authors argued that the significant increase in female self-employment in agriculture (by 15.5 million) between 1999–2000 and 2004–05 might have been distress-driven, to supplement household earnings during a period of slowing rural incomes (see Thomas 2015 for a review).

Table 4: Average Annual Growth of Incomes and Wages in India, 1991–92 to 2017–18

Period	Incomes (GDP at Factor Cost/GVA at Basic Prices)					Rural Real Wages, Male Casual Workers
	Agriculture and Allied	Industry	Construction	Services	All Sectors	
1991–92 to 2004–05	2.7	6.0	6.5	7.9	6.2	2.8*
2004–05 to 2011–12	3.8	8.5	8.4	9.9	8.5	6.0
2011–12 to 2017–18	2.8	8.3	3.4	8.6	7.1	3.7

Incomes refer to GDP at factor cost at 2004–05 prices for the period from 1991–92 to 2011–12, and to gross value added (GVA) at basic prices at 2011–12 prices for the period from 2011–12 to 2017–18; Rates of growth of incomes were estimated using semi-logarithmic regression of time-series data for the respective time-periods. Also reported are compound annual growth rates of wages between various points in time.

*Corresponds to the growth between 1993–94 and 2004–05.

Source: National Accounts Statistics (NAS) for income data and NSSO reports and PLFS for data on wages.

Table 5: Sector-wise Estimates of Workers in India, 2005, 2012 and 2018 (million)

Sectors	All Workers			Female Workers		
	2005	2012	2018	2005	2012	2018
1 Agriculture and allied activities[1]	258.8	224.5	197.3	107.8	79.2	59.2
2 Industry	60.0	66.4	65.1	18.0	18.5	14.6
2a Manufacturing	55.9	61.3	60.3	17.4	17.8	14.2
3 Construction	26.0	49.9	54.6	2.8	7.8	5.4
4 Services	112.9	131.7	154.2	20.2	23.5	29.2
4a Trade	43.5	48.5	52.5	5.0	5.3	5.6
4b Transport, warehousing, and travel services	16.4	19.5	23.7	0.3	0.3	0.3
4c Communication (including tele and postal)	2.0	1.8	1.9	0.3	0.2	0.2
4d Hotels and restaurants	6.3	8.1	9.3	1.2	1.3	1.7
4e Finance, insurance, real estate[2]	3.9	6.1	7.4	0.4	0.8	1.1
4f Professional, scientific and technical activities and business services[3]	3.5	7.3	12.5	0.4	1.1	1.9
4g Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	8.9	8.3	8.0	1.0	1.0	1.2
4h Education	11.6	14.5	18.4	5.0	6.3	8.7
4i Health and social work	3.8	4.7	6.2	1.4	1.9	2.9
4j Personal services, domestic services and others[4]	13.0	12.9	14.2	5.2	5.3	5.7
All sectors	457.7	472.5	471.3	148.8	128.9	108.5

Estimates for January of the respective year. 1 Includes crop production, animal production, hunting, forestry, logging and fishing. 2 Includes rental and leasing activities. 3 Includes computer programming, information services, and publishing activities. 4 Others include recreational, cultural and sporting activities, and activities of membership organisations.

Source: Estimates based on NSSO (2006, 2014), NSO (2019) and Census of India.

When the NSSO conducted the next round of employment surveys in 2009–10 and 2011–12, India's rural economy had been on a path of recovery. Faster growth of agricultural incomes and a significant increase in governmental spending in rural areas, mainly through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), were central to this positive transformation. However, despite the progressive changes in the countryside, the size of the workforce engaged in agriculture and allied activities declined in India between the 2004–05 and 2011–12 survey rounds, from 258.8 million (in January 2005) to 224.5 million (in January 2012), based on our estimates. An absolute decline in the size of the agricultural workforce (by 34.3 million) coupled with a modest increment in non-agricultural employment (by 49.1 million) meant that overall employment increased only marginally in India during the second half of the 2000s—by 14.8 million (Table 5).

The absolute fall in the numbers of agricultural workers in India, as observed by the NSSO surveys in the late 2000s—for the first time in the history of these surveys—marked a new stage in the structural transformation of India's labour market. This has to be seen in the context of the prediction by Arthur Lewis (1954) and others about how, in developing countries, the "surplus labour" in agriculture will shift to the modern sectors, as the economy advances to higher stages of development. In fact, the decline in the proportion of workers in agriculture and allied sectors to total workers has been rather slow in India over the decades: 56.5% in 2004–05, which declined to 47.5% in 2011–12, and further to 41.9% in 2017–18 (Table 5, p 59). In comparison, the ratio between agricultural workers and all workers in China was 50.0% in 2001, which declined to 34.8% in 2011 and 26.8% in 2018 (World Bank nd).

Pull of rural construction jobs: Both "push" and "pull" factors appear to have caused the movement of the workforce away from agriculture in India after the mid-2000s. The decrease in female self-employment in agriculture between 2004–05 and 2011–12—in a reversal of the sharp increase in female agricultural employment between 1999–2000 and 2004–05—might have been induced partly due to an improvement in income-earning opportunities for men in rural India (Thomas 2015).

There was a marked acceleration in the country in the growth of incomes and employment in the construction sector after 2004–05. The construction sector generated 23.9 million new jobs in India between 2005 and 2012, which was almost half of all jobs generated outside agriculture (49.1 million) during that period (Table 5). The major beneficiaries of the increase in construction employment were the less-developed and chiefly agrarian states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (MP). Using data from the Labour Bureau, Das and Usami (2017) show that rural and agricultural wages in India grew at a rapid pace between 2007–08 and 2014–15, after remaining stagnant between 1998–99 and 2006–07.

Rural reversals after 2012: The size of the workforce engaged in agriculture and allied activities in India fell further, from 224.5 million in 2012 to 197.2 million in 2018 (thus a decline amounting to 27.3 million). It is unlikely that "pull" factors played a role in causing the reduction in agricultural employment between 2012 and 2018, as they did during the period from 2005 to 2012. First, the growth of agricultural incomes slowed down between 2012–13 and 2017–18 relative to the growth during the 2004–12 period (Table 4). The causes for the slowdown in agricultural growth after 2012 include frequent monsoon failures (2012, 2014, 2015 and 2017), falling agricultural prices, and the continued underinvestment in agriculture.

Second, and more importantly, there has been a severe compression in the growth of incomes from the construction sector after 2012. This may be linked to the general slowdown in the expansion of rural incomes and rural demand during this period. The demonetisation of high-value currency notes in November 2016 was a blow to the informal economy and to the construction sector. In a clear reversal, incremental employment created in the country in the construction sector fell sharply from 23.9 million between 2005 and 2012 to 4.7 million between 2012 and 2018 (Table 5). While the share of rural areas in incremental employment generated in construction was 85.8% between 2005 and 2012, this share fell to 34% between 2012 and 2018. As a result, fresh employment opportunities created in rural India on account of construction fell from 18.9 million during the seven years from 2005 to 2012 to 1.6 million during the six years from 2012 to 2018.

Between 2005 and 2012, the size of the male agricultural workforce had declined in a number of poor Indian states, notably, MP, Bihar, UP and Rajasthan, possibly on account of the pull of new, rural construction jobs created in these states. In contrast, between 2012 and 2018, MP, UP and Rajasthan registered increases in the size of their male agricultural workforce, in what may appear like a structural retrogression in their labour markets. The workers' shift back to agriculture was likely due to the stagnant growth of employment in construction and other non-agricultural sectors in these states after 2012.

Considering the reduction in the growth of incomes and employment that occurred in rural India between 2012 and 2018, its impact on rural wages was less emphatic. Real wages of male casual workers in rural areas grew at a fairly noticeable rate of 3.7% per annum between 2012 and 2018, although it was distinctly slower than the corresponding growth between 2005 and 2012 (Table 4). Das and Usami (2017) show that the growth of rural wages in India declined in 2015–16, but improved from the latter half of 2016–17. The effects of a stagnant growth of rural employment on wages (and perhaps even on electoral outcomes) appear to have been moderated to some extent by an increase in governmental spending. Developmental expenditures incurred by the central and state governments, combined as a proportion of India's GDP, had reached a peak of 16.8% in 2008–09, fell over the subsequent years to 15.0% only by 2014–15, but increased again to reach 17.5% in 2017–18.[2]

Job losses in manufacturing: The growth of manufacturing employment in India has not been remarkable from the second half of the 2000s onwards. Estimates based on the NSSO's household surveys show that India's manufacturing sector employed a total of 61.3 million in 2012, up from 55.9 million in 2005. This represented an increase of 5.4 million, which was only 11.0% of the incremental non-agricultural employment created during that seven-year period (2005–12) (Table 5). At the same time, factory-sector data from the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) shows that employment in India's organised manufacturing rose from 8.2 million in 2004–05 to 12.9 million in 2011–12. This amounted to an increase of 4.7 million new jobs, which was remarkable, given that India's factory sector had been characterised by near "jobless" growth between the early 1980s and the mid-2000s (Thomas 2019b).

The statistics referred above suggest that almost the entire increase in total (organised and unorganised combined) manufacturing employment in India between 2005 and 2012 (by 5.4 million) was possibly on account of employment growth in the organised sector (increase by 4.7 million). They also point to the possibility of a sharp downward fall in the growth of employment in micro and small firms in India's unorganised manufacturing from the mid-2000s onwards. Small-scale manufacturing firms in India have been hit by infrastructure bottlenecks, including power shortages, inadequate availability and high cost of credit, competition from imports, and a growing distance between the small and big firms with respect to their capabilities and business interests (Thomas 2019b).

Estimates based on household surveys (NSSO and PLFS) suggest that the size of manufacturing (organised plus unorganised) employment declined in India from 61.3 million in 2012 to 60.3 million in 2018 (Table 5). At the same time, ASI data shows that employment in organised manufacturing continued to increase during most of this period, from 12.9 million in 2011–12 to 14.3 million in 2016–17. These recent statistics point out that India's manufacturing sector may have lost one million jobs overall between 2012 and 2018. Micro and small industries in the unorganised sector suffered extremely severe job losses. Reports suggest that demonetisation and the introduction of goods and services tax (GST) (in July 2017) created disruptions in the informal sector. They appear to have reinforced some of the long-standing hurdles faced by micro and small industries. Female workers accounted for almost all of the job losses suffered by Indian manufacturing after 2012 (Table 5).

Revival in employment growth in services: While employment growth in India decelerated after 2012 in the case of manufacturing and construction, it accelerated in the case of the services sector. Between 2012 and 2018, the size of employment in India's services sector grew by 22.6 million, or at an average annual rate of 3.8 million annually. The corresponding net increase between 2005 and 2012 was 18.8 million, or at an average annual rate of 2.7 million (Table 5).

The services sector activities that accounted for significant growth of employment between 2012 and 2018 were trade (4 million new jobs); transport, warehousing, and allied activities (4.2 million); education (3.9 million); health and social work (1.5 million); and a range of professional, scientific and technical, and business services (5.3 million new jobs). There was indeed a remarkable expansion in the size of employment—from 7.3 million in 2012 to 12.5 million in 2018—in professional, business and allied services, which include jobs in the information technology (IT) sector (Table 5). This is a sector that employs relatively high-skilled workers and offers better (than the economy-wide average) wages.

Between 2005 and 2018, while the size of the workforce attached to agriculture and allied activities in India declined from 258.8 million to 197.3 million, those engaged in the non-agricultural sectors, that is, in industry (comprising manufacturing; mining and quarrying; electricity, gas and water supply; and sewerage and waste collection), construction, and services combined—increased from 198.9 million to 274.1 million. Between 2005 and 2012, the incremental employment created in India in industry, construction and services combined was 49.1 million, which was more than the reduction in the size of employment in agriculture and allied activities (by 34.3 million). On the other hand, between 2012 and 2018, new employment created in industry, construction and services combined (26.1 million) was less than the employment decline in agriculture and allied activities (by 27.3 million) (Table 5).

Women, Young Men and Jobs Crisis

In this section, we analyse how well the growth of labour demand in India has matched with the expansion of labour supply in the country. Persons who are 15–59 years old and are neither engaged in agriculture nor enrolled in educational institutions could form a potential supply of workers for industry, construction and the services sectors (if they are provided the necessary skills to make them employable).

Our analysis shows that new job opportunities created in India after the mid-2000s favoured older men far more than women and young men. Men who were 30–59 years old accounted for 64.3% (or 28.7 million out of 44.6 million) of all workers (15–59 years old) who newly joined industry, construction and services in India between 2005 and 2012. Between 2012 and 2018, 30–59-year-old men accounted for an even higher share—91.8% (23.6 million out of 25.7 million)—of all new non-agricultural jobs, leaving too few new jobs for women and young men (Tables 6 and 7, p 62).

Unemployment among young men: Between 2005 and 2012, while the population of men aged 15 to 29 years in India increased from 153 million to 178.8 million, those who were attached to agriculture or allied activities within this category declined from 50.8 million to 41.5 million. Furthermore, students within this population category increased from 35.1 million to 58.2 million. Therefore, 15–29-year-old men, who were neither engaged in agriculture, nor were students, numbered 67.1 million (153.0 – (50.8+35.1)) in 2005, which rose to 76.1 million in 2012, an increase of 9 million. These 9 million young men were potential new workers for the non-agricultural sectors. At the same time, the actual absorption of

15–29-year-old men into job opportunities in industry, construction and services during 2005–2012 amounted to 8.1 million (from 57.8 million to 65.8 million), which was very close to the increase in potential labour supply (Table 6).

Between 2012 and 2018, potential non-agricultural workers within the category of 15–29-year-old men rose from 76.1 million in 2012 to 94.0 million in 2018, an increase of 17.9 million. However, during the same period, the size of 15–29-year-old men who were actually absorbed into the non-agricultural sectors grew by 1.8 million (from 65.8 million to 67.6 million). The result was a sharp upward climb in the number of the unemployed within the category of 15–29-year-old men, from 6.7 million in 2012 to 21.1 million in 2018. Unemployment rate shot upwards, from 5.9% in 2012 to 17.7% in 2018 (Table 6).

The size of the workforce engaged in agriculture or allied activities actually increased among men in the 30–59-year-old category in India between 2012 and 2018, unlike the shift away from agriculture that happened in the case of women and younger men. Furthermore, as shown earlier, the rate of growth of non-agricultural employment was faster among 30–59-year-old men than among other categories. As a result, the increase in unemployment after 2012 was less marked among men who were 30–59 years old than among younger men (Table 6).

Withdrawal of Females from the Labour Market: The growth of employment opportunities for females has been particularly slow in India over the last two decades. On the one hand, women workers accounted for 79.0% of the total decline in agricultural employment in India after the mid-2000s. Between 2005 and 2018, the size of the workforce engaged in agriculture and allied activities fell by 48.6 million (from 107.8 million to 59.2 million) in the case of females and by 12.9 million in the case of males (Table 5). On the other hand, women managed to secure 10.9% (or 8.2 million out of 75.0 million) of all new job opportunities created in India in industry, construction and services combined between 2005 and 2018. The biggest generator of female employment in India between 2005 and 2012 had been construction (5 million new jobs). However, between 2012 and 2018, female employment declined drastically in manufacturing (by 3.5 million) and construction (by 2.4 million) (Table 5).

At the same time, female employment increased substantially between 2005 and 2018 in a few relatively high-skilled sectors such as education (by 3.7 million), health and social work (by 1.5 million) and professional and allied services (by 1.5 million). Women accounted for more than half of all the incremental employment created in education and health after the mid-2000s, although it appears that a large part of these women workers (including anganwadi workers and accredited social health activist [ASHA] or community health workers) are being paid poorly (Table 5).

Between 2005 and 2018, as the population of 15–59-year-old women increased from 307.6 million to 417.2 million, those engaged in agriculture and allied activities within this category declined from 94.3 million to 50.3 million. Women (15–59 years old) who could have been potential workers in the non-agricultural sectors grew in size, from 190.0 million to 309.5 million, an increase of 119.5 million. At the same time, however, the growth of new employment opportunities for women in the non-agricultural sectors was meagre— 8.1 million new jobs (from 37.3 million in 2005 to 45.4 million in 2018) during this period.

The response by females to such a massive mismatch between labour supply and labour demand was to withdraw altogether from the labour force.

Table 6: Distribution of Men Aged 15 to 59 Years in India, by Activity Status (million)

	Males, 15–29 Years			Males, 30–59 Years		
	2005	2012	2018	2005	2012	2018
1 Population	153.0	175.8	198.2	176.0	206.5	237.8
2 Employed	108.5	107.2	97.8	170.7	201.0	226.9
2a In agriculture and allied activities	50.8	41.5	30.3	79.1	80.7	83.0
2b In industry, construction and services	57.8	65.8	67.6	91.6	120.3	143.9
3 Unemployed	6.1	6.7	21.1	0.8	0.8	3.3
4 Students	35.1	58.2	73.9	0.1	0	0.2
5 Domestic duties	0.7	0.9	2.0	0.5	0.4	0.9
6 Potential non-agricultural workers (1-(2a+4))	67.1	76.1	94	96.8	125.8	154.6
As % of population (rows 7 to 9)						
7 Employed	70.9	61.0	49.3	97.0	97.3	95.4
8 Unemployed	4.0	3.8	10.6	0.5	0.4	1.4
9 Students	22.9	33.1	37.3	0.1	0.0	0.1
10 Unemployment rate, %	5.3	5.9	17.7	0.5	0.4	1.4

Unemployment rate is unemployed (3) as % of labour force (2+3). Labour force is the sum of employed plus unemployed. "Domestic duties" refer to activity statuses 92 and 93 combined.

Source: Estimates based on NSSO (2006, 2014), NSO (2019) and Census of India.

Table 7: Distribution of Women Aged 15 to 59 Years in India, by Activity Status (million)

	Females, 15–29 Years			Females, 30–59 Years		
	2005	2012	2018	2005	2012	2018
1 Population	141.9	163.2	184.3	165.7	198.4	232.9
2 Employed	48.2	36.5	24.5	83.3	76.3	71.3
2a In agriculture and allied activities	33.5	20.3	11.2	60.8	47.5	39.1
2b In industry, construction and services	14.8	16.2	13.3	22.5	28.8	32.1
3 Unemployed	3.2	2.7	5.7	0.8	0.5	1.2
4 Students	23.2	42.3	57.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
5a Domestic duties (92)	42.2	46	74.8	49.5	67.7	119.9
5b Domestic duties plus (93)	23.5	34.1	20.4	28.8	50.1	33.6
6 Potential non-agricultural workers (1-(2a+4))	85.2	100.6	116	104.8	150.8	193.5
As % of population (rows 7 to 10)						
7 Employed	34.0	22.4	13.3	50.3	38.5	30.6
8 Unemployed	2.3	1.7	3.1	0.5	0.3	0.5
9 Students	16.3	25.9	31.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
10 Domestic duties (5a+5b)	46.3	49.1	51.7	47.3	59.4	65.9
11 Unemployment rate, %	6.2	6.9	18.9	1.0	0.7	1.7

Row 5b refers to persons who are engaged in domestic duties and also in other activities such as tailoring for household use (Activity status 93).

Source: Estimates based on NSSO (2006, 2014), NSO (2019) and Census of India.

According to official data, 15–59-year-old females attending domestic duties increased from 144 million in 2005 to 248.7 million in 2018. At the same time, the growth of the unemployed within the category of 15–59-year-old females was much smaller, from 4 million in 2005 to 6.9 million in 2018 (Table 7).

Conclusions

India faces a stiff challenge in creating decent jobs, with the growing size of its working-age population and rising enrolment of young adults for education. Labour absorption has been declining in the country in agriculture, especially so within the categories of women and young men, although agriculture and allied activities employed 41.9% of India's total workforce even in 2017–18. Therefore, it becomes crucial that the generation of new employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sectors—industry, construction, and services—keep pace with the growth of potential job seekers.

Construction had been the major source of employment in India between 2005 and 2012, accounting for half of all non-agricultural jobs generated during that period. The growth of construction jobs benefited men in rural areas, providing them a livelihood outside of agriculture. This growth was linked to an overall revival in India's rural economy that lasted roughly between 2007–08 and 2011–12.

Compared to the second half of the 2000s, the growth of the agricultural and construction sectors slowed down after 2012. New employment opportunities created in rural India in construction fell from 18.9 million between 2005 and 2012 to 1.6 million during the 2012–18 period. The manufacturing sector lost one million jobs between 2012 and 2018, with micro and small firms in the informal sector suffering severe setbacks. At the same time, some segments of the services sector, especially education and professional, business and allied services recorded acceleration in employment growth after 2012. Overall, the net increase in employment in India in the non-agricultural sectors declined from 49.1 million during 2005–12 to 26.1 million during 2012–18. The crisis in the growth of rural incomes and employment appears to have been moderated to some extent with an increase in governmental expenditures during 2016–18.

Between 2012 and 2018, 30–59-year-old men obtained 91.8% of all new employment opportunities created in India (for 15–59-year-olds) in industry, construction and services. The actual increase in non-agricultural employment opportunities for young men and women was significantly less than the supply of potential job seekers among them. Women appear to have been hit the most by the job losses in the informal sector, which were fuelled after 2016 by demonetisation and the introduction of GST.

The slow growth of new employment opportunities has prompted women to withdraw from the labour market. Official statistics from 2009–10 onwards have shown marked declines in the proportion of women who are workers, along with correspondingly large increases in the proportion of women who report their status as attending to domestic duties. A significantly large mismatch between potential labour supply and actual labour absorption was reported for the first time in the case of men in the 2017–18 survey. This has resulted in an unprecedentedly sharp increase in the number of unemployed among 15–29-year-old men in India, from 6.7 million in 2012 to 21.1 million in 2018. It needs to be noted that unemployed men who were 15–29 years old accounted for 68.3% of all unemployed persons in India in 2018.

The Indian economy will be able to reap the demographic window of opportunity only for the next two decades or so, after which the country's population will gradually start growing old. It will be a huge challenge for policymakers to create conditions that make more effective use of the strengths of its young women and men. Steps will be needed in several directions, including investments in human capital, revival of the productive sectors, and reinvigoration of entrepreneurship. At the same time, a failure to generate decent jobs quickly and in large enough numbers will have tremendous economic, social and political costs.

NOTES

1 Estimates based on data from National Accounts Statistics (NAS).

2 Estimates based on data obtained from RBI (2019).

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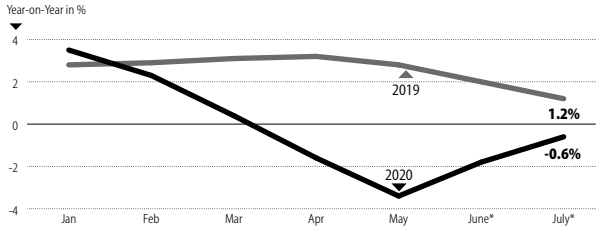
Wholesale Price Index

The year-on-year WPI inflation rate stood at -0.6% in July 2020 compared to 1.2% reported a year ago and -1.8% a month ago. The index for primary articles decreased by 0.6% against 5.5% registered a year ago but was higher than (-)1.2% a month ago. The index for food articles decreased by 4.1% compared to 6.6% recorded a year ago. The index for fuel and power declined further to -9.8% against the fall of (-)3.6% and the index for manufactured products increased by 0.5% compared to 0.3% reported a year ago.

Consumer Price Index

The CPI-inflation rate increased to 6.9% in July 2020 from 3.1% registered a year ago and 6.2% a month ago. The consumer food price index rose by 9.6% compared to 2.4% reported last year and 8.7% a month ago. The CPI–rural inflation rate increased to 7.0% and urban inflation rate to 6.8% from 2.2% and 4.2%, respectively, reported a year ago. As per Labour Bureau data, the CPI inflation rate of agricultural labourers (CPI–AL) increased to 7.2% in June 2020 from 6.3% registered a year ago while that of industrial workers (CPI–IW) decreased to 5.1% from 8.6%.

Movement of WPI Inflation January–July



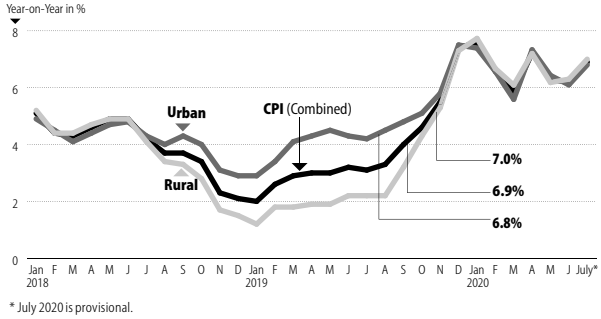
* Data is provisional; Base: 2011–12 = 100.

Trends in WPI and Its Components July 2020* (%)

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Averages) 2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
All commodities	100	1.1	-0.6	2.9	4.3	1.7
Primary articles	22.6	3.2	0.6	1.4	2.7	6.8
Food articles	15.3	3.4	4.1	2.1	0.3	8.4
Fuel and power	13.2	2.7	-9.8	8.2	11.5	-1.8
Manufactured products	64.2	0.0	0.5	2.7	3.7	0.3

* Data is provisional; Base: 2011–12=100; Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Movement of CPI Inflation January 2018–July 2020



* July 2020 is provisional.
Source: National Statistical Office (NSO); Base: 2012=100.

Inflation in CPI and Its Components July 2020* (%)

	Weights	Latest Month Index	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs) 2018–19	2019–20
CPI combined	100	154.2	1.6	6.9	3.4	4.8
Consumer food	39.1	157.2	2.5	9.6	0.1	6.7
Miscellaneous	28.3	149.2	1.5	7.0	5.8	4.4
CPI: Occupation-wise#						
Industrial workers (2001=100)		332.0	0.6	5.1	5.4	7.5
Agricultural labourers (1986–87=100)		1018.0	-0.1	7.2	2.1	8.0

* Provisional; #June 2020. Source: NSO (rural and urban); Labour Bureau (IW and AL).

Foreign Trade

The merchandise trade deficit narrowed down to $4.8 bn in July 2020 from $13.4 bn registered a year ago. Exports contracted by (-)10.2% to $23.6 bn from $26.3 bn and imports by (-)28.4% to $28.5 bn from $39.8 bn reported a year ago. Oil imports went down by 32.0% to $6.5 bn and non-oil by 27.3% to $21.9 bn from their respective values of $9.6 bn and $30.2 bn registered a year ago. During April–September 2020–21, exports decreased by (-)30.2% to $75 bn from $107.4 bn and imports by (-)46.7% to $88.9 bn from $166.8 bn reported a year ago.

Index of Industrial Production

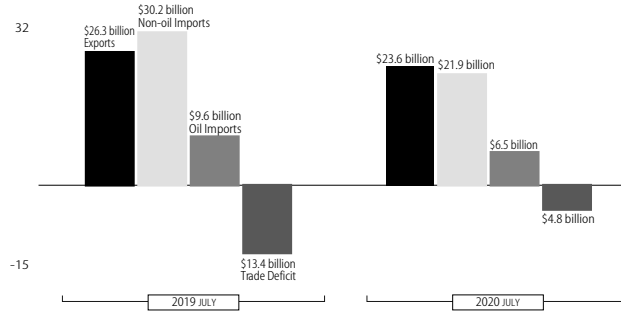
Due to the prolonged nationwide lockdown to contain COVID-19, the number of units responding was low. The quick estimate for the month of June 2020 was based on a weighted response rate of 88%. The index of industrial production stood at 107.8 in June 2020. The index figures for manufacturing stood at 106.9, mining at 85.4 and electricity at 156.2. As per used-based classification, the index of production of capital goods stood at 64.3 and that of infrastructure goods at 110.7. The index for consumer durables stood at 77.4 and non-durables at 157.3.

Merchandise Trade July 2020

	July 2020 ($ bn)	Over Month (%)	Over Year (%)	April–July (2020–21 over 2019–20) (%)
Exports	23.6	7.9	-10.2	-30.2
Imports	28.5	34.9	-28.4	-46.7
Trade deficit	4.8	-703.3	-64.1	-76.5

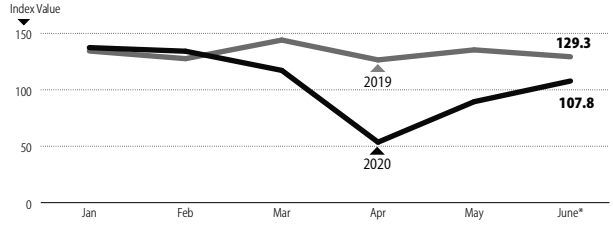
Data is provisional. Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Components of Trade July 2019 and July 2020



Oil refers to crude petroleum and petroleum products, while non-oil refers to all other commodities.

Movement of IIP January–June



* June 2020 are quick estimates; Base: 2011–12=100.

Industrial Indices: Sector-wise June 2020* (%)

	Weights	June 2019	June 2020	Financial Year (Avgs) 2018–19	2019–20
General index	100	129.3	107.8	3.8	-0.8
Mining	14.4	106.5	85.4	2.9	1.6
Manufacturing	77.6	129.0	106.9	3.9	-1.4
Electricity	8.0	173.6	156.2	5.2	1.0
Industrial Growth: Use-based					
Primary goods	34.0	127.8	109.2	3.5	0.7
Capital goods	8.2	101.9	64.3	2.7	-13.8
Intermediate goods	17.2	136.5	102.2	0.9	9.1
Infrastructure/construction goods	12.3	140.6	110.7	7.3	-3.7
Consumer durables	12.8	120.0	77.4	5.5	-8.7
Consumer non-durables	15.3	138.0	157.3	4.0	0.0

*June 2020 are quick estimates; Base: 2011–12=100.
Source: NSO, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Comprehensive current economic statistics with regular weekly updates are available at: http://www.epwrf.in/currentstat.aspx.

India's Quarterly Estimates of Final Expenditures on GDP

₹ Crore | At 2011–12 Prices	2017–18 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018–19 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019–20 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Private final consumption expenditure	1769688 (9.3)	1750056 (5.5)	1911901 (5.3)	1948175 (7.7)	1889008 (6.7)	1903853 (8.8)	2046415 (7.0)	2068782 (6.2)	1992967 (5.5)	2025488 (6.4)	2182352 (6.6)	2125099 (2.7)
Government final consumption expenditure	362769 (21.6)	367882 (7.4)	319547 (10.5)	293024 (8.9)	393709 (8.5)	407780 (10.8)	341988 (7.0)	335089 (14.4)	418249 (6.2)	465643 (14.2)	387729 (13.4)	380747 (13.6)
Gross fixed capital formation	958859 (0.7)	967190 (5.9)	1014300 (8.8)	1120847 (13.7)	1082670 (12.9)	1077942 (11.5)	1130201 (11.4)	1170154 (4.4)	1132195 (4.6)	1035736 (-3.9)	1071838 (-5.2)	1094323 (-6.5)
Change in stocks	49996 (61.7)	54050 (75.8)	52497 (78.3)	59252 (79.6)	64131 (28.3)	66159 (22.4)	63999 (21.9)	70126 (18.4)	67328 (5.0)	66999 (1.3)	64718 (1.1)	70445 (0.5)
Valuables	62905 (80.1)	46317 (25.0)	39512 (11.2)	43928 (1.5)	41080 (-34.7)	44629 (-3.6)	39252 (-0.7)	44772 (1.9)	51347 (25.0)	51761 (16.0)	43368 (10.5)	46153 (3.1)
Net trade (Export–import)	-137041	-85422	-128661	-125231	-122238	-141491	-104580	-51926	-117242	-76355	-44444	-59686
Exports	627176 (3.9)	639543 (4.5)	646620 (4.4)	688438 (5.0)	686695 (9.5)	719352 (12.5)	748505 (15.8)	767991 (11.6)	708546 (3.2)	703282 (-2.2)	703023 (-6.1)	702809 (-8.5)
Less imports	764217 (21.8)	724965 (10.5)	775281 (14.1)	813669 (23.6)	808933 (5.9)	860843 (18.7)	853085 (10.0)	819917 (0.8)	825788 (2.1)	779637 (-9.4)	747467 (-12.4)	762495 (-7.0)
Discrepancies	69397	132000	105705	151725	10803	73679	-17242	52683	-9576	15062	-62812	146521
Gross domestic product (GDP)	3136572 (5.1)	3232072 (7.3)	3314801 (8.7)	3491719 (7.4)	3359162 (7.1)	3432553 (6.2)	3500033 (5.6)	3689678 (5.7)	3535267 (5.2)	3584335 (4.4)	3642748 (4.1)	3803601 (3.1)

India's Overall Balance of Payments (Net): Quarterly

Item	2018–19 ($ mn) Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019–20 ($ mn) Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018–19 (₹ bn) Q1	Q2	Q3	04	2019–20 (₹ bn) Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Current account	-15803	-19054	-17752	-4647	-15004	-7579	-2630	558	-1059 [-2.3]	-1337 [-2.9]	-1279 [-2.7]	-328 [-0.7]	-1044 [-2.1]	-534 [-1.1]	-187 [-0.4]	40 [0.1]
Merchandise	-45751	-50037	-49281	-35214	-46774	-39650	-36040	-35042	-3065	-3510	-3552	-2482	-3253	-2793	-2567	-2536
Invisibles	29947	30984	31529	30567	31769	32070	33410	35600	2006	2174	2272	2154	2209	2259	2380	2577
Services	18676	20256	21678	21331	20075	20941	21879	22027	1251	1421	1562	1503	1396	1475	1558	1594
of which: Software services	18605	19286	19895	19868	20998	21064	21455	21125	1246	1353	1434	1400	1460	1484	1528	1529
Transfers	17031	19331	17424	16160	17964	19952	18893	18400	1141	1356	1256	1139	1249	1405	1346	1332
of which: Private	17216	19511	17558	16317	18224	20188	19132	18673	1153	1369	1265	1150	1267	1422	1363	1352
Income	-5760	-8603	-7573	-6925	-6270	-8822	-7361	-4827	-386	-604	-546	-488	-436	-621	-524	-349
Capital account	4787	16604	13770	19241	28624	13580	23626	17350	321 [0.7]	1165 [2.5]	992 [12.1]	1356 [2.7]	1991 [4.0]	956 [1.9]	1683 [3.3]	1256 [2.4]
of which: Foreign investment	1427	7612	5199	15856	18835	9791	17572	-1782	96	534	375	1117	1310	690	1252	-129
Overall balance	-11338	-1868	-4296	14162	13984	5118	21601	18794	-760 [-1.7]	-131 [-0.3]	-310 [-0.6]	998 [2.0]	973 [2.0]	360 [0.7]	1539 [3.0]	1360 [2.6]

Figures in square brackets are percentage to GDP.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Excluding gold but including revaluation effects	7 August 2020	9 August 2019	31 March 2020	Variation Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year So Far 2019–20	Financial Year So Far 2020–21	Financial Year 2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
₹ crore	3699829	493774	400181	3344616	16686	93593	13367	218620	25300	353270	68050	668976
$ mn	493774	17001	49700	443645	-27784	83458	227550	16297	10160	53217	-14168	56831

Monetary Aggregates

₹ Crore	Outstanding 2020	Variation Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year So Far 2019–20	Financial Year So Far 2020–21	Financial Year 2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
Money supply (M_3) as on 31 July	17626219	89429 (0.5)	1984800 (12.7)	209351 (1.4)	826288 (4.9)	1170657 (9.2)	1469481 (10.5)	1367863 (8.9)
Components								
Currency with public	2576289	4716 (0.2)	491790 (23.6)	32290 (1.6)	226574 (9.6)	495583 (39.2)	292496 (16.6)	297506 (14.5)
Demand deposits	1649150	17789 (1.1)	210548 (14.6)	-187911 (-11.6)	-88543 (-5.1)	86962 (6.2)	142801 (9.6)	111180 (6.8)
Time deposits	13361073	67396 (0.5)	1273224 (10.5)	366246 (3.1)	687058 (5.4)	585266 (5.8)	1026347 (9.6)	952412 (8.1)
Other deposits with RBI	39707	-471 (-1.2)	9238 (30.3)	-1273 (-4.0)	1199 (3.1)	2817 (13.4)	7835 (32.8)	6766 (21.3)
Sources								
Net bank credit to government	5594799	-40274 (-0.7)	716283 (14.7)	490026 (11.2)	688216 (14.0)	144799 (3.8)	387091 (9.7)	518093 (11.8)
Bank credit to commercial sector	10925516	-23264 (-0.2)	586747 (5.7)	-43950 (-0.4)	-113129 (-1.0)	802225 (9.5)	1169004 (12.7)	655926 (6.3)
Net foreign exchange assets	4194144	170169 (4.2)	1012081 (31.8)	111222 (3.6)	393107 (10.3)	364065 (14.2)	148546 (5.1)	730196 (23.8)
Banking sector's net non-monetary liabilities	3114555	17201 (0.6)	330625 (11.9)	348059 (14.3)	141907 (4.8)	140995 (6.8)	235396 (10.7)	536777 (22.0)
Reserve money as on 7 August	3187260	11775 (0.4)	414838 (15.0)	1941 (0.1)	157586 (5.2)	518300 (27.3)	351701 (14.5)	259193 (9.4)
Components								
Currency in circulation	2686070	8289 (0.3)	491768 (22.4)	57531 (2.7)	238791 (9.8)	494078 (37.0)	307423 (16.8)	310508 (14.5)
Bankers' deposits with RBI	461436	3460 (0.8)	-86137 (-15.7)	-54396 (-9.0)	-82452 (-15.2)	21405 (3.9)	36444 (6.4)	-58081 (-9.6)
Other deposits with RBI	39755	27 (0.1)	9207 (30.1)	-1194 (-3.8)	1247 (3.2)	2817 (13.4)	7835 (32.8)	6766 (21.3)
Sources								
Net RBI credit to government	1075013	-48822 (-4.3)	-14133 (-1.3)	287195 (35.8)	82821 (8.3)	-144836 (-23.3)	325987 (68.5)	190241 (23.7)
of which: Centre	1065083	-48442 (-4.4)	-20153 (-1.9)	284763 (35.6)	75342 (7.6)	-145304 (-23.5)	326187 (68.8)	189268 (23.6)
RBI credit to banks & commercial sector	-360149	-14824 (4.3)	-201782 (127.4)	-311218 (-203.6)	-159256 (79.3)	372643 (-120.5)	89478 (0.0)	-353744 (0.0)
Net foreign exchange assets of RBI	4017184	147900 (3.8)	985035 (32.5)	183562 (6.4)	426781 (11.9)	363571 (15.2)	87806 (3.2)	741816 (26.0)
Govt's currency liabilities to the public	26315	0 (0.0)	314 (1.2)	113 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	572 (2.3)	236 (0.9)	427 (1.6)
Net non-monetary liabilities of RBI	1571102	72478 (4.8)	354596 (29.1)	157711 (14.9)	192760 (14.0)	73650 (8.8)	151805 (16.7)	319547 (30.2)

Scheduled Commercial Banks' Indicators *(₹Crore)*

(As on 31 July)	Outstanding 2020	Variation Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year So Far 2019–20	Financial Year So Far 2020–21	Financial Year 2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
Aggregate deposits	14161689	86504 (0.6)	1417107 (11.1)	170811 (1.4)	594197 (4.4)	668390 (6.2)	1147721 (10.0)	993721 (7.9)
Demand	1528386	17853 (1.2)	204337 (15.4)	-187238 (-12.4)	-88617 (-5.5)	88843 (6.9)	141004 (10.3)	105716 (7.0)
Time	12633303	68651 (0.5)	1212770 (10.6)	358049 (3.2)	682814 (5.7)	579547 (6.1)	1006717 (10.0)	888005 (8.0)
Cash in hand	86118	2726 (3.3)	9363 (12.2)	1879 (2.5)	-1142 (-1.3)	-1295 (-2.1)	14811 (24.7)	12384 (16.5)
Balance with RBI	435414	-6370 (-1.4)	-82853 (-16.0)	-47440 (-8.4)	-100772 (-18.8)	16906 (3.3)	40021 (7.6)	-29521 (-5.2)
Investments	4278294	59904 (1.4)	721231 (20.3)	176007 (5.2)	530945 (14.2)	287494 (9.5)	62602 (1.9)	366293 (10.8)
of which: Government securities	4276406	58903 (1.4)	722966 (20.3)	174438 (5.2)	537710 (14.4)	287657 (9.5)	61595 (1.9)	359694 (10.6)
Bank credit	10265888	-25723 (-0.2)	536887 (5.5)	-42721 (-0.4)	-104972 (-1.0)	783965 (10.0)	1146297 (13.3)	599138 (6.1)
of which: Non-food credit	10186601	-19124 (-0.2)	520347 (5.4)	-63858 (-0.7)	-132495 (-1.3)	795906 (10.2)	1146676 (13.4)	588984 (6.1)

Capital Markets

	14 August 2020	Month Ago	Year Ago	Financial Year So Far Trough	Financial Year So Far Peak	2019–20 Trough	2019–20 Peak	End of Financial Year 2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
S&P BSE SENSEX (Base: 1978–79=100)	37877 (1.5)	36033	37312 (-1.4)	27591	38493	25981	41953	32969 (12.1)	39714.20 (12.4)	29816 (-21.8)
S&P BSE-100 (Base: 1983–84=100)	11314 (1.7)	10693	11124 (-4.9)	8180	11438	7683	12456	10503 (11.5)	12044.07 (9.1)	8693 (-25.2)
S&P BSE-200 (1989–90=100)	4730 (2.8)	4466	4600 (-6.3)	3416	4779	3209	5185	4433 (12.0)	4986.55 (7.1)	3614 (-25.1)
CNX Nifty-50 (Base: 3 Nov 1995=1000)	11178 (1.4)	10607	11029 (-3.5)	8084	11323	7610	12362	10114 (11.1)	11922.80 (11.1)	8660 (-24.3)
CNX Nifty-500	9214 (2.7)	8693	8971 (-7.8)	6638	9308	6243	10119	8912 (12.6)	9805.05 (5.3)	7003 (-26.3)

Figures in brackets are percentage variations over the specified or over the comparable period of the previous year. | (-) = not relevant | - = not available | NS = new series | PE = provisional estimates

■ Comprehensive current economic statistics with regular weekly updates are available at: http://www.epwrf.in/currentstat.aspx.

Secondary Market Transactions in Government Securities and the Forex Market—Weeks Ending 7 and 14 August 2020

1 Settlement Volume of Government Securities (G-Sec) Transactions (Amount in ₹ Crore)

Week Ended	14 August 2020		7 August 2020		16 August 2019		2020–21*		2019–20**	
	Number of Trades	Volume	Number of Trades	Volume	Number of Trades	Volume	Number of Trades	Volume	Number of Trades	Volume
Outright	11274	189193	10882	195651	12704	180463	242416	4249654	443266	5825474
Repo	3144	435776	3287	484541	1438	172290	52990	7918237	45766	5119305
TREP	3915	847921	4061	811762	2649	444399	82347	17231798	78816	12906712
Total	18333	1472890	18230	1491953	16791	797152	377753	29399689	567848	23851491
Daily Avg Outright	2255	37839	2176	39130	4235	60154	2694	47218	4818	63320
Daily Avg Repo	629	87155	657	96908	479	57430	535	79982	458	51193
Daily Avg TREP	783	169584	812	162352	883	148133	832	174059	788	129067

2 Instrument-wise Outright and Repo Details (Amount in ₹ Crore)

	Outright	Repo	Outright	Repo	Outright	Repo
Central Government	141573	308180	147681	339348	141876	124696
State Government	8577	94415	9368	96567	7084	27796
Treasury Bills	39043	33181	38602	48625	31503	19798
Total	189193	435776	195651	484541	180463	172290

3 Top 5 Traded Central Govt Dated Securities (14 August 2020)

Security Description	Trades	Value (₹ Crore)	% Value to Total
5.79% GS 2030	3656	36679	25.91
6.19% GS 2034	2436	27178	19.20
5.22% GS 2025	626	15101	10.67
6.45% GS 2029	731	9334	6.59
6.18% GS 2024	246	4783	3.38

4 Category-wise Buying/Selling Activity (Market Share %) (14 August 2020)

Category	Outright		Reverse Repo	Repo	TREP Lending	TREP Borrowing	NDS-Call Lending	NDS-Call Borrowing	Forex	
	Buy Side	Sell Side	Buy Side	Sell Side	Buy Side	Sell Side	Buy Side	Sell Side	Buy Side	Sell Side
Cooperative Banks	3.13	2.61	0.35	0.66	0.36	0.76	59.10	1.53	0.13	0.14
Financial Institutions	1.19	0.30	0.00	0.07	1.59	8.56	-	-	0.18	0.13
Foreign Banks	18.48	23.89	25.90	26.14	0.32	10.59	2.42	1.24	45.74	48.25
Insurance Companies	2.57	1.15	2.41	0.00	23.72	0.00	-	-	-	-
Mutual Funds	21.44	12.68	64.15	0.18	63.91	1.26	-	-	-	-
Others	5.45	3.15	0.04	1.32	10.09	4.72	-	-	-	-
Primary Dealers	9.37	16.72	3.72	46.75	0.01	8.03	0.00	45.15	-	-
Private Sector Banks	21.67	27.70	3.36	20.47	0.00	52.31	22.25	18.38	28.94	28.18
Public Sector Banks	16.71	11.81	0.08	4.41	0.00	13.77	16.23	33.71	25.00	23.30

5 Trading Platform Analysis—Trading Value (Amount in ₹ Crore) (14 August 2020)

Week Ended	OTC			NDS-OM			Brokered Deals		
	Number of Trades	Volume	Market Share (%)	Number of Trades	Volume	Market Share (%)	Number of Trades	Volume	Market Share (%)
Central Government	744	27542	17.55	10930	129370	82.45	49	3912	2.49
State Government	263	5651	66.93	324	2792	33.07	26	1665	19.72
Treasury Bills	99	20089	50.42	343	19753	49.58	18	4840	12.15
Total	1106	53282	25.97	11597	151914	74.03	93	10417	5.08

6 Settlement Volume of Forex Segment

Segment	14 August 2020		7 August 2020		16 August 2019		2020–21*		2019–20**	
	Number of Deals	Volume ($ mn)	Number of Deals	Volume ($ mn)	Number of Deals	Volume ($ mn)	Number of Deals	Volume ($ mn)	Number of Deals	Volume ($ mn)
Cash	1292	19784	1346	20639	766	11189	23504	367162	28824	398294
Tom	1670	23487	1838	28245	1316	17128	31358	457400	46130	523989
Spot	42719	42078	47228	47245	54600	41472	751059	802528	1433434	1281972
Forward	392	2393	322	2441	552	3651	60748	443629	73792	542520
Total	46073	87741	50734	98571	57234	73440	866669	2070719	1582180	2746775
Average	9215	17548	10147	19714	19078	24480	9420	22508	17580	30520

7 Tenor-wise Forward Trades

Tenor	14 August 2020			7 August 2020			16 August 2019		
	Number of Deals	Value ($ mn)	% to Total Value	Number of Deals	Value ($ mn)	% to Total Value	Number of Deals	Value ($ mn)	% to Total Value
< 30 days	25	484	20	31	790	32	60	1474	40
> 30 days & < = 90 days	44	614	26	29	541	22	98	1280	35
> 90 days & < = 180 days	37	541	23	22	172	7	38	128	4
> 180 days & < =365 days	52	603	25	53	800	33	59	558	15
> 1 year	38	151	6	26	138	6	21	211	6
Total	196	2393	100	161	2441	100	276	3651	100

* Data pertain to 1 April 2020–14 August 2020; ** Data pertain to 1 April 2019–16 August 2019.
(i) Tables 1 to 5 relate to Securities Segment, and (ii) Tables 6 and 7 relate to Forex Segment.
Source: Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL).

Sameeksha Trust

A Special Appeal

For more than half a century, the ***Economic & Political Weekly* (*EPW*)** has been a major presence in India's intellectual space. It has been a crucible for ideas and a forum for debate, which has created a journal of international repute that has become a virtual institution. *EPW* provides a multidisciplinary platform for academics and practitioners, researchers and students, as well as concerned citizens, for critical engagement with economy, polity and society in contemporary India.

It has always been a struggle to ensure *EPW*'s financial viability and sustainability. The resource constraint has been exacerbated by our conscious decision to abstain from receiving grants from governments and donations from abroad, to preserve the autonomy and independence of the journal.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent nationwide lockdown, *EPW* is now experiencing an unexpected and drastic drop in revenue from retail sales (as there has been no print edition for three months) and advertisement income (as advertising has contracted sharply with the crisis in the economy), resulting in an acute financial crisis. This is not unique for *EPW* alone. However, while other print media organisations have resorted to closures, large-scale retrenchment of staff, and salary cuts, it has been our endeavour not to undertake such drastic measures in *EPW*. In the first two months of the lockdown, full salaries were paid to all *EPW* staff. The Editor and his team adopted drastic austerity measures and cut expenditure to the bone. In spite of this, there was a large operational deficit every month, which could aggravate further if the problems associated with and following the lockdown, persist. If this excess of expenditure over income goes unchecked, a stage would come when we would no longer be able to keep *EPW* alive.

The situation became so critical in the month of June that there was no other choice but to implement a temporary measure of reducing staff salaries. This is being done for the months of June and July 2020 in a graduated progressive manner ranging from 0% to 40%. The situation, however, continues to remain extremely uncertain. The financial situation of *EPW* will be reviewed again in August 2020.

In these difficult and troubled times, an institution of *EPW*'s stature and credibility is needed more than ever before. Well-wishers of *EPW* have been reaching out and urging us to do whatever necessary to ensure *EPW*'s sustainability.

We therefore appeal to the community of readers, contributors, subscribers and well-wishers of *EPW* to come forward and make donations to the extent each one can, so as to ensure that *EPW* continues to perform its historic role. This is urgent. And it is of utmost importance. We hope you will join us in supporting *EPW*.

Trustees, Sameeksha Trust and Editor, *EPW*
9 July 2020

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