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Winter 2025
January 2025

USTM Journal of International Studies

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Editorial

I am proud to edit this inaugural issue of the USTM Journal of International Studies (UJIS). The USTM Journal of International Studies (UJIS) is a peer-reviewed online journal of the Centre for Advanced International Studies, University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya, India— that seeks to advance the frontiers of research and scholarship in International Relations and Area Studies. It provides an open-access platform for the academics, scholars and practitioners in the field of International Relations, Diplomacy, and Area Studies. The journal publishes two issues per year: (1) Winter issue in January and (2) Summer issue in May. Occasionally, special issues will be brought out focusing on a particular theme.

Particular focus of the journal is on the integration of scholarship and practice with equal emphasis on publication of articles of serving and retired diplomats and officials of UN and other inter-governmental organizations providing practitioners' perspectives and insights, and also articles and research papers by scholars of international relations and area studies with focus on empirical studies as well as on papers that make theoretical and conceptual advancements in the field.

Instead of confining ourselves into strict boundaries of a narrow definition of International Relations, the journal seeks to provide space to a diverse range of issues, concerns, and phenomena that straddle international borders and that calls for cooperation between nations or entities located in different nations.

It is a matter of great pride for us that in this inaugural issue, we have been able to include a number of cutting-edge research papers that advances the frontiers of research and scholarship in international relations and area studies. All the papers have been selected on the basis of recommendations of competent and highly qualified peer-reviewers.

Dr. Indrani Talukdar (PhD, JNU), who is a faculty at the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, in her paper 'Energy and Water Issues could be a challenge for Shanghai Cooperation Organisation', finds that the world is witnessing a shift in the dynamics of geo-economics from the West to the East, with the simultaneous rise of many Asian economies. She finds that Energy and water are two potential challenges that have the capacity to derail the engagements between the member states of SCO.

Dr. Aparna Chaudhary (PhD, JNU), who is an Assistant Professor of Political Science in the University of Allahabad, has examined "The Role of Social Media in Facilitating Women's Rights in Iran". She finds that social media influences the process of political socialization, public opinion, different manifestations of digital activism, in Iran and domestic and global responses to this. The paper also examines the impact of digital activism on the government and the traditional conservative section of Iran.

Mr. Prosper Malangmei (MPhil, JNU), who is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Maharaja Bodhchandra College (affiliated with Manipur University), Imphal, Manipur, in his paper “Liberal International Order with Chinese Characteristics”, finds that the rise of China has made it possible for the latter to be assertive in its economic policies, geopolitical ambitions, and alternative vision for global order that seeks to replace the current United States led liberal international order that came into prominence after World War II, which is characterized by multilateralism, rules-based institutions, free trade, and the precedence for human rights and democracy. He finds that although China benefits from the current US led Liberal International Order, it wishes to reshape its rules and norms to conform to its national interests. He argues that the future prospect of the LIO is conditional on the deft handling of the US and China in seeking common interests and managing their differences in a constructive manner. Failure to do so could result in a new Liberal International Order with Chinese characteristics.

Dr. Samrita Das (PhD, JNU), in her paper “India-Russia Cooperation in the Far East in the Changing Global Context: The Significance of Eastern Economic Forum”, analyses the evolving relationship between India and Russia, focusing on their cooperation in Russia's Far East. The paper examines the historical context of their partnership, highlighting periods of both closeness and distance, shaped by geopolitical shifts and national priorities. The paper specifically explores the significance of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) as a platform for enhancing bilateral economic and strategic cooperation, particularly in light of China's growing influence in the region. The paper discusses various opportunities for collaboration, including energy, infrastructure development, and resource extraction in the Russian Far East, ultimately arguing that a strengthened partnership benefits both nations. The paper concludes by suggesting strategies to further enhance this relationship in the face of complex global dynamics.

Prajakta Sawant and Pooja, PhD candidates and UGC fellows, Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament (CIPOD), School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in their paper “Reimagining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with their Roots in the Anthropocene”, examine the roots of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015. They find that the baseline of a healthy ecosystem is not adequately represented in the SDGs framework. The paper argues that the SDGs are rooted in the Anthropocene epoch. The paper re-evaluates the existing SDGs through the lens of planetary boundaries and ecological limits to ensure human development along with environmental conservation. The paper finds that the current framework of SDGs does not adequately factor in climate change as a cause of the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Atreyee Sengupta, PhD Candidate (SRF) in the Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament (CIPOD), School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in her paper “Sport and International Politics: A Study of Global Trends in the Geopolitics of Football” examines the role of football as a focal point for geopolitical contestations and socio-political issues. Examining cases like FIFA and UEFA banning

Russia's national and club football teams from participating in their competitions, the geopolitical tensions that surfaced during the Qatar FIFA World Cup in 2022, and the key socio-political trends relating to securitization, nationalism and sustainability apparent in the UEFA Euro 2024, the paper finds that football's influence on international relations and global politics is undeniable. The paper examined the intersection of football, international politics, and the significant trends that encapsulate the geopolitics of football.

The paper incorporates qualitative methods drawing on the paradigms of constructivism and postcolonialism, along with critical discourse analysis as its methodological approach.

Each of the six above mentioned papers was selected for publication in this issue only after competent and highly qualified external peer-reviewers certified that the paper makes "a substantial contribution to the scholarship in international relations or in area studies". I hope that the scholars and practitioners of international relations and area studies will immensely benefit from the findings reached by these six research papers included in this volume. I hope this inaugural issue will be proved to be a good beginning in the journey of this journal in its mission of advancing the frontiers of scholarship in international relations and area studies.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those, whose guidance, cooperation, and help made our endeavour to have an impactful inaugural issue a success.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Mahbubul Hoque, Chancellor, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya, whose vision of USTM having an international journal of world class quality in collaboration with the academics of the world's leading universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, MIT, etc., inspired us to dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of this task.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Chief Advisor of this journal Prof. Gauri Dutt Sharma, Vice Chancellor, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya & former President, Association of Indian Universities, for his constant support and guidance throughout the process.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the seven eminent members of the editorial board of the journal, namely, Prof. G. John Ikenberry, Professor, Princeton University, who is considered as the world's leading authority on the Liberal Theory of International Relations and is ranked among the world's Top 10 scholars of International Relations; Prof. Zbigniew Wojnowski, Associate Professor, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford; Prof. Catriona Kelly, Senior Research Fellow, Trinity College, University of Cambridge; Prof. Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Professor, Department of Politics & International Studies, University of Cambridge; Prof. Sugata Ray, Associate Professor, Dept of South & Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley; Prof. Amitabh Mattoo, Dean, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and Subrata Ghoshroy, Research Affiliate, Program in Science, Technology & Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It is a matter of great pride for us that our editorial board consists of some of the world's topmost authorities in the field of International Relations and Area Studies. Their

guidance has played a crucial role in the success of our efforts to ensure that this inaugural issue of journal maintains a world class quality in terms of the contribution to scholarship of the research papers published here. It is our hope that with their help and guidance, we will be able to establish our journal as one of the world's leading journals in the field.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all the members of our editorial team for their assistance and dedication in making this endeavour a success. In particular, I would like thank our Associate Editors Prof Thagiram Gogoi, Dr. Trishna Mani Thakuria, and Dr. Jhorna Sharma, and our assistant editors Ms Jrange Marak and Mr. Tridip Boruah, for the time and efforts, they have put to make this endeavour a success.

I would also like to express a special thanks to our Book Reviews Editor Dr. Jyoti Murmu, who in spite of her busy schedule as an Assistant Professor in the Rashtriya Raksha University, Gandhinagar, has devoted considerable efforts in making this endeavour a success.

I would also like to thank our competent and highly qualified peer-reviewers who have found time from their busy schedule to review and assess the papers submitted to us and thus helped us in ensuring that only those papers which make a substantial contribution to the scholarship in international relations or in area studies are included in this issue.

Finally, for any shortcoming that the journal might have, I take full responsibility. We will be open to suggestions/criticisms from readers and the wider academic and scholarly community and will try to further improve our journal by taking into consideration those suggestions/criticisms. I look forward to the continued guidance, cooperation, and assistance from all concerned to ensure that the journal moves ahead in its pursuit of advancing the frontiers of research and scholarship in International Relations and Area Studies.

Dr. Rejaul Karim Laskar
Editor-in-Chief
USTM Journal of International Studies

Energy and Water Issues could be a challenge for Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Dr. Indrani Talukdar

Abstract

The functioning of regional integration initiatives such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) have been established by some of the regional powers with the focus on achieving common objectives of countries with similar orientations be it for economic or political or security issues. It is found that the regional groups like SCO are performing better despite changing dynamism in the global economy. The world is witnessing a shift in the dynamics of geo-economics from the West to the East, with the simultaneous rise of many Asian economies. With India and Pakistan as members and the expansion of its observer status to include others, the SCO along with the other expanded regional economic initiatives such as Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), International North South Corridor (INSTC) and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), has the capacity to contribute towards the secured net of many sectors, including in the sectors of energy and water security as well as food security in Eurasia. The region is becoming an epicentre for the convergence of powers with their interests and goals as well as a potential battleground of competition/tension for the powers involved. Energy and water are two potential challenges that has the capacity to derail the engagements between the member states within SCO.

Key words: SCO, potentiality of the Eurasian region due to regional cooperation, challenges including energy and water security and recommendations.

Regional integration initiatives such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are formations or processes working for the common objectives of countries with similar economic development and security orientations. Groupings like SCO are performing better despite changing dynamism in the global economy and security. In the economic sector, it is being witnessed that the world is witnessing a shift in the dynamics of geo-economics from the West to the East, with the simultaneous rise of many Asian economies.

Eurasia is becoming an epicentre for the convergence of powers with their interests and goals, as well as a potential battleground of competition/tension for the powers involved (inclusive, transparent, and mutually beneficial growth is lacking, though in paper these are the

objectives). In this context, Central Asia lies in the heart of the Eurasian continental space. The opening up of China to the rest of the world in the early 1980s, the economic liberalisation of India beginning from early 1990s, globalisation, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and the ambitions of these five independent ex-Soviet states helped in the continental economic integration process of Eurasia.

The establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan was an important step in this backdrop. The objective was to build it into a multi-faceted organisation that takes care of all aspects of the region's development. In each passing year, it is becoming important on the global as well as the regional level.

With the establishment of SCO and various multilateral regional economic and connectivity projects, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), International North South Corridor (INSTC) and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), there is a merging of landlocked economies with the maritime ones. These initiatives open Eurasia to vast avenues of development and opportunities. Cooperation amongst these multilateral fora promises to reach out to the remote locations in the region; develop the infrastructure including transport, health care, education, science & technology etc. These would help in the upliftment and betterment of the living conditions of the people in the continent and accelerate the socio-economic development of the region. The Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) also might help in boosting the economic development in the region.

With the inclusion of India and Pakistan as members and the expansion of its observer status to include others, the SCO along with the other expanded regional economic initiatives, can contribute towards the secured net of many sectors, including in the sectors of energy and water security as well as food security in Eurasia.

The strengthening of SCO can help in the strengthening of other regional economic initiatives on the continent as they are complementary, with common members being part of SCO as well as most of the other economic projects. Cooperation through mutual consultation, sustainability, and sharing of benefits will boost the creation of network of physical and digital connectivity that would extend in Eurasia (*Ministry of Defence, 2018*).

How SCO can help in Strengthening of Regional Economic Continent

Given the centuries-old connection amongst each other through shared commonalities of art and culture, ideas, and knowledge; language and traditions, even before SCO or EAEU or INSTC etc. were formed, the region has the potential to develop itself as a peaceful, stable, transparent, inclusive, and prosperous area. In the current times and in the changing

geopolitical scenarios, development and connectivity of multiple regional economic initiatives will be successful when all the stakeholders understand that every aspect or sectors as well as challenges are interlinked.¹ It is important to have strong trust for a seamless flow of goods, services, capital, and people.

In fact, closer coordination and cooperation between various regional economic cooperation and SCO will also lead to having a better understanding of each other's mechanisms. As the Indian Prime Minister had said, that the SCO will represent approximately 42 percent of the world's population, 20 percent of its GDP, and 22 percent of the landmass; therefore, the progress of the SCO is the advancement of the vast masses and land area of the world.

With India as its full member, SCO boundaries have stretched from the Pacific to Europe and from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean. India would no doubt benefit from SCO's strengths in energy, natural resources, and industry. In turn, India's strong economy and its vast market could drive economic growth in the SCO region. Also, India's stature in the international community as an influencing voice can also add to the value addition to the organisation, including in the future.

India's capacities in trade, investments, information and communication technology, space, S&T, agriculture, health care, small and medium scale industry can bring wide spread economic benefit to the SCO countries. Likewise, other countries with different regional initiatives, as well as the SCO member states bring their strengths to the region.

An Inter-economic cooperation would help in tackling the various issues such as energy, water, food, science & technology, health care, IT, climate change etc issues faces Eurasia. With the current Russia-Ukraine war and the after effects of it, especially in the food security area makes it an urgent need to cooperate inter-economically with each other and find solutions for the bigger picture.

Challenges

The region through SCO and other regional economic initiatives opens the path to more avenues; however, it also faces challenges in many areas. The problems the region faces are terrorism, narcotics, economic disparity, uneven development in the industrial revolution², being home to the four nuclear powers, language barriers as an impediment to the business and

¹It has been seen that the crisis that takes place in the neighbouring countries has an impact on the stabilized countries some way or the other.

²Countries like India, China and Russia are in advanced level of Industrial Revolution i.e. 4.0 IR however, other countries including SCO members like the five Central Asian countries, and others are at the level of 2 to 3 IR.

investment atmosphere, energy, water and food security issues, and global climate change, to name a few.

Out of all the challenges, the paper focuses on energy and water security issues.

Energy

Ensuring energy security is among the priority areas for sustainable development of the entire region. The Central Asian countries, along with Russia, have significant energy potential, including hydrocarbon and hydropower resources. Asia is becoming the biggest consumer of energy; hence, the demand and supply links both the regions intrinsically.

The territory of the SCO member states holds about 25 percent of global oil reserves, over 50 percent of gas reserves, 35 percent of coal, and about half of the world's known uranium reserves. The biggest oil and gas pipelines have been laid or are being built here. The SCO comprises both countries that are big energy producers and importers. On the one hand, this makes them internally dependent on each other, and on the other, it creates the basis for multilateral interaction. At the same time, challenges also emerge.

There is competition amongst the producers in the region. The diversification of buyer countries from different producers creates an unhealthy atmosphere. There is a covert discomfort amongst the producers within the region due to the diversification of energy baskets by buyers. Along with the fear of diversification, the other issues existing within the energy suppliers, such as competition, ambitions, access to markets, and quality of the products etc., might create a non-conducive atmosphere. With the development in the region through various economic initiatives, as well as bilateral transactions between energy producers and buyer countries might aggravate the problem rather than resolving it. Though countries like Kyrgyzstan depend on Russia for their energy imports, the March 2018 meeting where the Central Asian leaders came together to work closely with each other and resolve issues, including on energy related issues stands to create competition for other strong producers like Russia in the region.

The signing of the Convention of the Caspian Sea in August 2018, though, it is a positive development, but in reality, and in the future, it contains seeds of discontentment. Russia, and in recent years China, are the main buyers of the hydrocarbon resources. Russia has been dominating the energy transportation space in Eurasia and wants to become the transporter of Caspian hydrocarbons to the West. However, Russia may face difficulties in maintaining its monopoly with the emergence of other players such as the Central Asian countries and the Caspian Sea members Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan, as independent energy

suppliers.³ Following the signing of the convention, Turkmenistan was likely to pursue the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline (TCP) towards European markets. This could have created another energy supplier to the European market in addition to Russia, which Moscow would try to prevent. Moscow may not want any competitor in the lucrative market, where it meets one fourth of the demands. It has been the largest natural gas supplier to the EU in 2016 and 2017, constituting about 39 percent and 37 percent, respectively (Eurostat, 2018). However, problems have occurred in the TCP despite the agreements and negotiations among the parties. It remains a challenge given the other financial problems attached to this pipeline (Huseynov, 2024). With the Ukraine war and its relations at the lowest, Russia is focusing on Asia, including the TAPI project. It is keen on supporting and becoming a part of the project where the Turkmen gas will flow to South Asia. The pipeline is still in progress. With the mix of energy-producing and energy-consuming members in SCO, it could have established an energy club and utilized its platform for addressing the challenges and bringing together the countries, including the buyer countries. With the SCO expansion and the other regional economic initiatives where the members are almost the same, hence the establishment of long-term, mutually beneficial cooperation amongst all can be thought of.

Inclusion of India as an SCO member also opens the Eurasian region to various connectivity projects such as India's inclusion in the Agreement on the Establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor or Ashgabat Agreement; the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway Project; and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative, amongst others. Likewise, the other member countries with their various other memberships in different multilateral economic initiatives added to the development in a positive manner.

Water

Water till now has not been on the side of positive development in the region, including amongst the SCO members.

The coming together of SCO and other regional economic initiatives also invites the bilateral problems such as the upstream and downstream countries in this region. For example, Central Asia, India, Pakistan, and China face the bilateral challenges of upstream and downstream problems. The Irtysh and Irti cross-border water issue between Kazakhstan and China remains. Pakistan keeps bringing up the Indus Water Treaty as a problem. Though China has resumed sharing information on water with India after the Doklam stand-off, this is an area, apart from

³ Russia's reaction towards the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline has not been positive. Even the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) or 'East West corridor' did not receive good reaction from Russia.

the border issue, that remains a challenge to India. It is because of the several dam constructions that China is undertaking, putting India at risk.

Article 3 of the SCO Charter calls to promote cooperation in water resources management and to implement joint environmental projects and mutual assistance in case of natural catastrophes or those caused by human actions (SCO Charter, pg. 4).

To resolve issues within Central Asia, 3-4 mechanisms such as the International Fund for the Saving of the Aral Sea (IFAS), the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC), the ICWC Scientific and Information Centre (SIC), and offices of the two Basin Water Management Organizations (for the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya) are in place. To further accelerate the process of resolving this issue, on March 15, 2018, a consultative meeting of the Central Asian leaders took place. They discussed and committed to resolve various issues, including water and energy issues that the region faces. They agreed to jointly resolve issues in the interests of all states on hydropower construction and use of water resources. Former president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev said that water issues in Central Asian countries should not be subject to political bargaining (*Times of Central Asia*, 2018). There has been steady progress among these five neighbours to cooperate. With the looming impact of global climate change and its impact on the melting of the Himalayan glaciers, these countries are trying to resolve their issues. This also applies to other member states within SCO. For India-Pakistan, though the Indus Water Treaty is there, however, Pakistan tries to create issues time and again. India, understanding the question of survivability for people in its neighbour, has never used water as a weapon against Pakistan⁴. Likewise, China discreetly tries to create problems for India. As Beijing controls the upstream portions of major rivers that flow into India, it gives China the advantage of controlling the water resources. For the time being, both sides have kept water issues in the desecuritization zone (Ho, 2021). However, China has the capability to use water for political and strategic leverage over India.

Solutions

The resolution of energy and water-related issues is important because of the inter-linkage with other issues such as food, climate, etc. With the depletion of water levels and global climate change, agriculture would be further affected. Supply chains of food would get impacted either by mismanagement and waste or through protectionist measures. Some of the solutions that can be taken up by SCO and other regional economic initiatives are the following:

⁴Pakistan has been using state-sponsored terror as a tool to cut India into thousand pieces as well as uses the water card to pressure India.

- Involving all stakeholders, including business, state institutions, and the scientific community.
- Integrated management of water wastages, water storage problems, accessible drinking water, rain harvesting etc.
- A common inter-institution interaction amongst SCO, EAEU, INSTC, ASEAN etc. can be opened where transparent information regarding the release of water from rain-swollen dams and barrages and hydrological data, etc., can be discussed.
- Sharing of data is important to avoid floods. Data sharing must be good and reliable and not inferior data and broken data.
- Discussion on water rights, hydropower construction, water releases, and electricity-sharing issues through practical-based study and feedback of local autonomous bodies can be done.
- Conservation of biodiversity and development of a network of protected natural areas. Building of dams threatens fragile ecosystems, wetlands, and protected forests. Preservations of them can help in sustainable livelihoods for the rural areas.
- The implementation of the UN General Assembly of the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Baruah, 2014)⁵ to resolve water issues can be thought about.
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency are where SCO Energy Club can integrate with others such as the EAEU, ASEAN etc.
- The Uzbek-Tajik energy agreement of 2018 is showing positive results in addressing the water and energy issues in both countries as the agreement promises mutual benefits⁶.
- Countries might want to address the rise in population. It would help in the accomplishment of SDGs, including energy, water, and food.

Conclusion

⁵The convention commits state parties to the utilisation of transboundary rivers in “an equitable and reasonable manner” and requires them to take “all appropriate measures to prevent the causing of significant harm” to co-riparians.

⁶For example, through the Uzbek-Tajik agreement, Tajikistan is able to raise its power production and sell the excess to neighbouring countries, while Uzbekistan may start implementing advanced irrigation methods, such as the drip irrigation.

If a strong SCO can help in strengthening regional economic cooperation between the various economic initiatives and connectivity projects, then it might be possible to witness the lines in actuality “vasudhaiva kutumbakam” (meaning "the world is one family"). For this, genuine and unshakeable trust and transparency are needed.

It is because Eurasia is a home to many challenges, such as the regional conflicts, disparity amongst the member states within SCO or in the other economic initiatives, terrorism, uneven development in the industrial revolution⁷ etc. This region is also the home of the four nuclear powers, which might become a challenge in the future. Energy, water, and food security challenges, along with global climate change, are other real threats that face the region.

The threats mentioned above can either create divisions or bring the continent together, and here lies the importance of SCO. To further strengthen the organisation, bringing all the member states to a similar level will be important.

It will be important to have regular and transparent communication amongst each other. At the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting on 24 April 2018, the foreign ministers had pointed out that the SCO has established itself as a prominent intergovernmental organisation of a new kind and an authoritative international actor by acting in the Shanghai Spirit, which stands for mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, coordination, respect for diversity, and the determination to foster cooperative development. In reality, how far it can be worked out needs to be seen. It is because in every SCO meeting, the heads of state engage with each other for mutual positive outcomes; however, the results at an optimised level need to be seen.

With the expansion of members and the decision to expand it further, it will also create challenges such as groupings of like-minded members within the organisation. If this sort of grouping happens, then the spirit of SCO would fail to bring mutual benefits and development to the region. Avoiding this kind of sub grouping within the organisation would be important. More transparent communication and resolution, including on tough issues such as water security, needs to be focused. Cooperation amongst SCO and other regional economic cooperation would also take care of hegemonic tendencies of some powers. Hence, if worked in the right direction and with correct vision, then a bright future waits regionally and globally despite the challenges through SCO.

About the Author: Indrani Talukdar is a faculty at the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign

⁷Countries like Russia and India are in advanced level of Industrial Revolution i.e. 4.0 IR however, other countries including members are at the level of 2 to 3 IR.

Service, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. She holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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The Role of Social Media in Facilitating Women's Rights in Iran

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Abstract:

This paper examines the role of social media in channelising the women rights' activists demand for gender-equality. It extends to the process of political socialization, public opinion, different manifestations of digital activism, and domestic and global responses to this. It evaluates the charge that this activism is a West's conspiracy against Iran to destabilise the Iranian state. Along with all these significant points, it delves deep into the socio-cultural fabric of Iranian society and the patriarchal norms and value system. Significantly, it also describes the impact of digital activism on the government and the traditional conservative section of Iran.

Key words: social media, women rights, gender-equality, political socialization, public opinion, and digital activism.

Introduction

In every society, the existing tools, networks and channels for communications are used to showcase the likes and dislikes toward the authority. Few might give their consent for the status quo, on the other hand, few may declare their dissatisfaction and choose to be revisionist. However, in both the cases, the mediums of communications play a significant role. With the passage of time, these mediums got changed yet the essence remains the same that is to express the consent or discontent. In the 21st century, due to the wider expansion of social media, the geographical distance could somehow able to maintain its relevance merely up to few sectors like export-import of solid materials etc.

A major chunk in this direction is contributing vehemently to the concept of global village. Now, the world is more connected as was never before. People-to-people interconnectedness, exchange of ideas, increased exposures to the new cultures; languages; cuisine etc., are paving the way for a new world. Adding to this, in authoritarian regimes, to suppress the public conscience has been difficult. The credit goes to the extensive network of these social media platforms. They make the spread of news easy, less time-consuming and reach to the largest number of people. Significantly, these platforms do not confirm the geographical boundaries. Someone from Iran can befriend with an American citizen and discuss the socio-political status of the Rights and Justice in their respective territories. This is something that has never been

witnessed before in the course of history. The centuries before, people relied on pigeons, then telephone was invented and after that mobile. In mobile phone categories, the smart-phones and the apps installed into this are the part of major revolutionary era. Its robust network made the proceedings of communications, information exchange and news-sharing very easy. The social media is the part of this revolution. Different platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, X, Threads, Blogs, Vlogs, etc. are powerful tools in this regard. The rest or few refer it worst too, part is that almost free flow of information exists here. Also, anyone can be active on these platforms without any restrictions by creating an account on these platforms. These are widely used by most of us. No finance issue as such, family background, or any other restrictions are put to control the information flow in the case of the democratic countries. However, the authoritarian regimes, dictatorships, military junta or one party-ruled countries have started controlling these platforms. In these countries, the controlled and restricted use of social media is in practice and also strong surveillance mechanisms are there to keep a track on the activities of the social media users. It includes what is being shared, liked, commented and written on these platforms. Interestingly, despite all these controls; restrictions and surveillance, the information flow could not be stopped. Despite this, the information and news break all these barriers and reach across the world due to social media platforms.

These platforms have emerged as the forums, actors, agencies and in certain extent the institutions for the process of political socialization. Both types of socialization- vertical and horizontal are taking place hereby. To build the public opinion; its manifestation and consolidation in various forms along with the criticism are being done successfully by them. Also, one needs not to forget that these are not the representatives of the elite or ruling class opinions since anyone can create their profile on these platforms. Although, sometimes the authenticity and credibility of various news or information hits the need to regulate them. The reason lies in the fact that these have wider reach, so, any misinformation that can be manipulated; misused or can create havoc, is also circulated freely. By the time, authorities take cognizance into this, enough damage is already done. However, the champions of democratic rights specially, right to freedom of speech and expression do not treat any restriction as desirable one. As per their opinion, by availing this option, the ruling groups perpetuate their hegemonic discourse into public domain and any criticism to them and their discourse is treated as punishable offence. So, it will be appropriate to consider these platforms as part of civil society and make them free from the authorities' interventions. Very interestingly, these can be utilized as a medium to understand what common people think; how they perceive the governance; whether they are approving certain government stance; what

they want; and many more. If these mediums are banned for any reason/s, this will ultimately lead not merely chaos in that country but also collapse of the central authority.

In western or other democratic countries where these platforms are extensively utilized by the people and their respective governments know how to address the grievances; issues, problems, agendas, etc. are raised on these platforms. In fact, the authorities try to communicate their people via these platforms. However, the situation is perplexed when it comes to a country like Iran due to its different political structure and institutions. Adding to this, it becomes more complex when there is a debate about gender-discourse specially women-rights. To challenge the patriarchal actors, agencies, networks, institutions and overall system is a giant task. It is like a Pandora's box. In Iran, the religion is a dominant player and the guide of the day-to-day life and then raising the issue of inequality that is deeply entrenched into the religious fabric of the society, very often driven by the misinterpretation of the religious preaching that amplifies the complexities. However, one more catalyst makes the situation worse, it is argued that few among women themselves do not want to either smash patriarchal values, practices, institutions and structures or raise their voices against discriminatory laws.

So far, the representation of women in public institutions is tilted towards male in Iran. The role of Morality Police and key posts very often occupied by males or female-patriarchs assist the government machineries to perpetuate the inequality; patriarchy; reward those who help them; and punish them who are against it. Also, in day-to-day life, the women are the worst sufferers. Their intellect is questioned; their abilities are put under the scanner; for basic needs, they are depending on their male-counterparts; several jobs are reserved only for males; the key decision-making posts are not held by women; and many more, are few in the list.

In between these equations, the expansion of social media in this country gave wings to women to express their grief, sadness, frustration, desire, assertion, demand for equality and rights etc. By utilizing these platforms, Iranian women came in contact with the other parts of the world and saw what rights, the women of the democratic countries possess. They are also on the journey towards making Iranian society a gender-neutral space. The countries where women have these basic rights, the women activists along with the male sympathisers struggled a lot to get boarded into this previously. The realization and the sense of injustice is pushing them to connect with the rest of the world and assert their rights on these platforms. It also has an intention to get the world-wide support for their cause. On these platforms, they are not only learning the process of political socialization but also how to aggregate their demands; how to put this on public forums; in what ways they can gain support across the world; and most importantly, how to get support from their own country-fellows and persuade the authorities

in their favour. However, this entire political socialization process is not that easy for these Iranian women, still many of them are using these platforms to create a support-base in favour of the existing regime. Women are writing their experiences on how they face discrimination in public domain. They post videos on how in the name of modest dress, the Morality Police harass them. Why in the 21st century, are they kept segregated from the various important key-posts in jobs and government offices? Why are they forced to wear hijab? Why is their public appearance monitored? Why can't they have the same level of liberty enjoyed by the western countries' women? These are the few significant questions centred around Iran.

In contradiction to this, there are many who perceive all these debates, discussions and dissents as part of west-led narrative to target Iran. Beginning with, it is explained as against the teachings of Islam; secondly, the U.S. wants to destabilize the Iranian political structure and install a pro-U.S. government in Iran; thirdly, Iranian women already have enough rights; fourth, Iran has its own definition of emancipation, liberty, freedom, equality and rights that is not west-centric; finally, any west-inspired practice or narrative is neither suitable nor desirable in Iran. Essentially, the proponents of this group share the thoughts that are sympathetic to the Iranian women's demands but they do not say it in precise and clear words in public domain because it has immense potential to create anarchy and chaos in their country. Also, the kind of dwindling and volatile situation currently, the West Asia region is facing, the collapse of central authority in Iran may lead to more volatility and fragility as put forwarded by few. Significantly, here the question is whether these are convincing arguments to suppress Iranian women's demand for gender-equality or it has any substance. In this context, the first part refers to a strategy deployed by the Iranian authorities to gain some time to deal with the genuine demands raised by Iranian women and their sympathisers. The later one includes even when it has any material evidence or substance still women rights need not to be discussed or not; in the name of saving a regime, is the sacrifice of gender-rights a just and appropriate stance? Moreover, in both the points, how long Iran will continue to undermine the just and humane demands of half of its population.

This paper delves deep into all these important aspects.

Background: From Iranian Revolution to till Date

The history of gender-based inequality in Iran is traced within its socio-cultural dimension that is hugely shaped by the religion i.e. Islam. Under the influence of Islam, the daily life was guided by some codes of conduct that greatly created a religious society dominated by the male patriarchs. However, the advent and success of Iranian Revolution 1979 gave a hope to Iranian

women. They perceived it as an opportunity to get freedom from the clutches of religious dogma and preachers. This is the reason why a big number of women actively and eagerly participated in the Iranian Revolution. Their participation played a decisive role in fetching the desired objectives to this revolution. Yet these desired objectives were merely the representatives of Iranian men; women were nowhere. Like several other Revolutions that took place in different parts of the world, women were asked to play the active role and assist their male counterparts but once the movement achieves its desired goals, the women are forgotten pages of the history that nobody likes to open again until another crisis takes place. Iranian women also could not form the exception and they also became a corner of the history that never come at the forefront. Ebadi (2006) writes that after the conclusion of the Revolution, the strict laws were imposed on women regarding their dress; mobility, rights etc. These include the gender segregation in public space and hijab became the mandatory part of their dress. Except this, the arrangement (structural and institutional) was designed in such a way to keep women under male's surveillance and state played the active role in facilitating this. Moghadam (2004) notes that despite all these restrictions, Iranian women have continuously expressed their distaste and disliking for all these patriarchal norms. They resisted in different ways. They never became submissive to either the patriarchal structure of the society or the state-led repression of their genuine demands for gender-equality. They demanded the right for higher education and greater participation in the workforce. They found their own ways to resist against the oppressive regime. Yet, the state-controlled media did not give them enough coverage and their protests did not find the appropriate mention in the mainstream Iranian newspapers.

A point can be made here is that agitation was present there but the platform/s to convert this agitation in the form of a collective-united voice was missing. This vacuum was filled by the social media platforms. On these platforms, Iranian women openly wrote against the patriarchal structure of the society responsible for their sufferings. They are using social media platforms to share their experiences, register their protests, gain local and global support for their cause, and to create a better Iranian society.

The Role of social media In Addressing Women's Grievances & Demands in Iran- In Iran, the social media platforms became so relevant and significant since it resuscitated the civil society space for political socialization and mobilization. Unlike state-controlled media spaces, it provides ample scope to register their protests against the existing system and regime. All the social-media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, Telegram, Blogs, Vlogs etc. facilitated

for critical stands on various issues. These have become new sources for the information-passing and news-sharing and greatly relied by common Iranian women and men. They are raising the issues of the human rights violations by the Iranian authorities in the name of moral polishing. Such issues either not reported or undermined by the mainstream state-controlled media in Iran. These virtual platforms are forming the basis for the solidarity and collective-voice in Iran. It also connects Iranian women rights' activists to the global feminists. It prepares them more vocal and assertive for their rights.

Several campaigns like #MyStealthyFreedom and #WhiteWednesdays which were initially started by activist Masih Alinejad but later got worldwide support. These were against the mandatory hijab. Women started taking photographs and shooting videos against this and posted it on several social media platforms. Khamis (2020) writes that such campaigns strengthened the Iranian women's struggle for gender-equality which can be seen as the manifestation of the digital activism. Such form of activism is significant because of the reason that it does not attract the instant punishment by the authorities because the social media network is very vast and extensive and hard to be kept under constant monitoring. So, by the time authorities get to know what has been posted or written on one or several social media handles, the news and information already would make its space in the public domain and even if one message has been posted and it was received by only one person still that message has wide reach. The second aspect is about the digital activism that meets with collective punishment which is again a contested topic in the Law discourse and receives huge criticisms. According to Mahdi (2020), these platforms depict the incidents in audio-visual forms that makes huge impact on larger public.

Hereby, it creates a lengthy demarcation line between the previous mediums of communication and contemporary social media networks. Earlier, the audio-video messages were accessible to few that too with high level of difficulty. Now, it is available only with one touch on the smartphones. This is why the process of political socialization has become easier and to communicate with the targeted audience has also become smooth and extensive. Also, it has been more effective in a sense that after watching these videos or listening audios, people can relate with them and assess the depth of the issue by their own.

Social-media platforms played a key role in mobilizing Iranian people specially women. For example, in 2022 when Mahsa Amini was brutally murdered by the Morality Police for inappropriately wearing hijab, the country-wide protests were embarked and a collective voice took the stage. The credit for this united voice goes to the social media platforms. Tufekci (2017) highlights the role played by X and Telegram to escalate the movement and enable

people to coordinate and communicate with each other. She adds that this country-wide protests could materialize due to the timely shared news of Mahsa Amini's death.

To succeed any movement, the prime requirement is to connect and communicate with the mass timely and in effective ways. The protest after the death of Mahsa Amini, witnessed by Iran was the prime example of this. In this case, the social media platforms have provided a connecting link between activists and common people. In case of women solidarity in Iran, it is playing a decisive role and its impact needs to be underlined and discussed. In a country like Iran where media is state-controlled and life is guided by religion, if women are raising their united voices via these platforms, then the significance of social-media platforms is huge and it needs to be highlighted. Khatib (2023) adds that the state-controlled media has always suppressed the dissent. However, the social media has enabled common people to register their resistance; their dissatisfaction; their dissent; and many more. Also, due to this, the global responses also reach on time and the international media coverage becomes easy and effective one.

Additionally, the social media platforms have paved the way for Iranian women's solidarity. Earlier, they used to raise their voices separately and sometimes in groups but to show their agitation in a planned and collective way, was difficult for them due to the lack of the wide-reaching, expanded network of communication. On these social media platforms, they share their stories without the fear of being judged by anyone. Since, they share their experiences here, many of them can co-relate with them because they also face the same level and intensity of discrimination, so, the solidarity becomes inevitable and their voice become collective narration. Tajali (2021) argues that this digital solidarity boosts the confidence of women that their experiences are not unique but there are many who faced and suffered with the same kind of harassment. This realization makes them strong and amplifies the struggle for women rights. Also, these platforms are the rays of hope for those women who live in a conservative environment. For them, to defy the patriarchal structure openly is difficult. They lack the resources and assistance to do so. Here, the role of social media becomes significant and it gives wings to these women and provides them platforms to register their resistance. Further, it creates space for the collective action. Tufekci (2017) highlights an important aspect related to the digital activism that it involves cost-cutting of participation and breaks geographic and social boundaries.

The role of social media influencers and activists become crucial here. Via their messages they have wider reach sometimes in millions. They act as a bridge between Iranian women and the international community. They narrate the stories and struggle of Iranian women to their

audience and appeal for the global call. Significantly, it has facilitated the citizen journalism too. The women who are not trained in formal courses of journalism, they are reporting the cases of harassment and documenting it in their own ways. Kraidy (2019) emphasizes that citizen journalism is providing more authentic view and narration of the ground realities. This can prove detrimental how Morality Police is suppressing Iranian women's voices.

By citizen journalism, Iranian women are preparing themselves to struggle and win against the authorities. They are also learning how to generate consensus or support for their causes; how to build public opinion; how to utilize the available channels of communication to convey their messages to the common people; and significantly, how to appeal the international organizations and people of other countries to take into cognizance of their cause. Also, Iranian women are getting more exposure and educating themselves in the language and politics of protests and resistance.

International Responses-

As per Amnesty International (2022), Iranian women got worldwide support for their cause. It was so visible after the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody. It has amplified the voices of Iranian women. Kian-Thiébaud (2022) argues that such movements underline the universality of gender-based struggles while drawing attention to unique cultural and political framework. In this context, Mohanty (2003) while highlighting the feminist movements across the world warns the innate tendency to universalize Western feminism. Adding to this, Moghadam (2020) has highlighted the interplay of religion, state, and globalization in shaping the feminist movement of any country. In this light, Iranian women's movement should also be seen in Iran's specific socio-political framework. Interestingly, Abu-Lughod (2013) has given another aspect to understand Iranian women's movement. As per this view, the neocolonial perspective to depict Iranian women as victims and not capable of leading their own movements must be rejected rather Iranian women can address and lead their movement in their own ways. Significantly, it cautions against the imposition of cultural imperialism in the name of global support. Adding to this, the international support for Iranian women's cause has attracted wide range of criticisms even within Iranian activists. They are astonished with the selective outrage of international responses. This support is perceived as motivated by the West-led hidden agenda, aims to serve their geopolitical interests. Enloe (2014) underlines the need to not fall in this trap and let this movement remain true to its cause. Any political agenda should not be taken into the consideration. Also, this movement must not be proceeded to serve the biased Western narrative of this region (West Asia).

In this context Afray (2016) is convinced to address Iranian movement in the framework of its cultural and political realities and suggests Iranian women should be at the centrestage of it. Along with this, some priorities should be set as the release of political prisoners and demand for international sanctions on those entities involved in promoting gender-based violence. Also, the probabilities to engage in dialogues must be explored. In a broader sense, this movement has amplified the intersectional communications. Different identities to name it gender, ethnicity, religion, and class etc. came together in it. Khosravi (2020) highlights that the challenges faced by Kurdish, Baluchi, and other ethnic minority women in Iran are often compounded by systemic discrimination. Such issues are also getting wider recognition and people not within Iran but across world, are discussing it.

Internationally, scholars like Mayer (2020) suggests, to utilize international institutions including global human rights framework etc. to build pressure on Iran for reforming its discriminatory laws. In this regard, the option to put economic sanctions on Iran is again a contentious topic. Erfani (2019) doubts its viability and effectiveness since any of such measures ultimately harm women in different ways by creating economic upheavals and limiting the growth opportunities for women. However, in this debate Parsi (2022) gives a moderate suggestion. He advocates for the targeted sanctions against officials responsible for creating fear psychosis and spreading gender-based violence. These targeted sanctions should be designed in a way that would put Iranian government under scanner and force it to go for the reforms. The social media platforms are pushing the international institutions also to take the cognizance of such issues in which the human rights violations are reported.

All these debates are widely discussed on various social media platforms. In other words, to make the world aware about Iranian women's cause, the role of digital platforms is the crucial one, since it paves the way for global solidarity. Al-Rawi's (2021) studies underline the role of social media in amplifying the marginalized voices, including Iranian women. Meanwhile, Degham (2022) asks for one more step that is to make tangible policy changes and international accountability because merely digital activism is not suffice.

Iranian Government's Response-

The Iranian government has deployed its best personnels to crush Iranian women's movement that has wider expressions on social media platforms. The monitoring, censoring and blocking access to the online contents is one such strategy used during times of unrest or when there are chances of the situations to go out of control. Also, the government's use of surveillance technology to track down and arrest activists involves in spreading anti-regime messages. Also,

social media platforms which have been Instrumental in organizing protests, are in a systematic way, targeted by the authorities and during the outbreak of any movement, these are frequently kept shutdown.

Also, women activists face online harassment on a larger scale. This cyber abuse very often orchestrated and sponsored by the government. Papacharissi (2015) argues that social media can go both the ways. It can be a tool of empowerment and also a space for intimidation and misinformation. In this process, women rights' activists are clubbed as anti-Islamic. Also, they are seen as the carriers of west's values. In domestic politics, these strategies are deployed to isolate and alienate women's rights activists and when there are a large number of populations who are conservatives then it becomes very easy for the authorities to do this successfully. Sadeghi (2019) notes that in Iran, the social media activism by the progressive section faces a severe criticism by the traditional-conservative section. They term their movements as un-Islamic and west's conspiracy against Iran.

Basically, by relating this women-rights movement with Islam, the state regime is using religion as a tool to arouse the voices against it; delegitimise it; isolate the activists; and finally crush the movement. Even if one accepts the west's conspiracy into this still why Iranian women should be deprived of their rights. As few claim that Iranian culture is different from the west. Its political-administrative ecology is not fertile for the west-centric approach or west-derived rights. However, here one should note that cultural-differences too cannot and must not form the basis for gender-based or any other form of discrimination. If such form of the discrimination is justified in the name of religious belief, that religion needs to be reinterpreted as per the requirements of the modern society. No exploitation or suppression of individual rights must be encouraged in any form.

Despite all these challenges, social media has played a crucial role in shaping the public opinion in some cases and also influencing policy-making in some extent. The younger generation is more sympathetic to women's movement. It has also created a space to discuss culturally-embedded norms which are irrelevant. Tufekci (2017) emphasizes that the social media shapes the public opinion. It conveys the real intentions, agendas of the regime and also presents a report card of their functioning. For instance, in Iran, many young Iranians started questioning the government's stance on women's issues. Notably, this younger generation is demanding more personal space for everyone.

The global attention generated by social media campaigns has placed pressure on the Iranian government. Keck and Sikkink (1998) notes that the international organizations working for the promotion of human rights cite these social media posts and take the matter into

cognizance. It paves the way for the diplomatic efforts to pressurize Iran to take appropriate action.

Sadeghi (2019) argues that Iranian government is now discussing to loosen the mandatory hijab laws and this rapprochement is reached due to the digital activism created by the social media platforms. Khatib (2023) indicates that social media campaigns have initiated the important debates and discussions about gender equality and the conservative people also started looking at cultural norms which are discriminatory to women, with an eye of assessment and relevance.

It should be noted here that the social media platforms have created a space not for discussing women rights but to exercise the Right to Dissent. Its ramifications will be huge since it is paving the way for the secular space that is a commendable contribution. Also, the mobility and direct communication to the public is another aspect to this. It provided the increased mobility and solidarity across the country. It should be seen as the harbinger to the change.

Conclusion- Social Media has gained prominence in Iran specially facilitating the debates and discussion for women's rights. The activists have utilized these platforms to convey their messages to the world and communicating with the people in efficient way. By doing so, they persuaded Iranian government to look into those issues which were previously ignored. Also, in building public-opinion and aggregating the demands, the social media platforms play a decisive role. The alleged role of west in conspiring against Iran seems lack of substantial ground and this argument is vehemently used only to provoke the conservative section to gain the support countrywide. At the last, despite facing several problems, the social media has become an important medium to transform the Iranian society specially when it comes to women rights. Although, the desired objectives are yet to achieve but its role in generating a secular and free space in the form of civil society cannot be denied.

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Liberal International Order with Chinese Characteristics

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Abstract

The United States (US)-led liberal international order (LIO) is an order of world governance that came into prominence after World War II (WWII), with multilateralism, rule-based institutions, free trade, and the precedence for human rights and democracy. The US's hegemony has instilled peace and progress in the aftermath of WWII. Under the tutelage of the US, the LIO has crafted multilateral institutions, for instance, the United Nations (UN), World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), ensuring global tranquillity, maintaining the market economy, and upholding international law. The LIO propagates liberal principles by giving importance to democratic governance, economic liberalisation, and collective security to create a conducive ambience for the development of the world. The US-led LIO has taken cognisance of the emergence of China as a global force. The rise of China has made it possible to be assertive in its economic policies, geopolitical ambitions, and alternative vision for global order. Although China benefits from the LIO, it wishes to reshape its rules and norms to conform to its national interests. The future prospect of the LIO is conditional on the deft handling of the US and China in seeking common interests and managing their differences in a constructive manner. Failure to do so could result in a new LIO order with Chinese characteristics, as the decline of the US is under scrutiny in international politics.

Keywords: Liberal International Order, China, United States, multilateralism, global governance.

Introduction

Following World War II (WWII), the United States (US) led the emergence of the liberal international order (LIO). The system became established all over the world, giving priority to economic liberalism, democracy, and human rights (Anno 2021). The LIO is an institution that was created to serve as a safeguard against future hostilities after lessons about the devastation

and instability brought about by WWII. The foundational principles of LIO are democracy, free trade, international cooperation, and collective security for world development to prevail. Global institutions, for instance, the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) were established to uphold the LIO's ideals. The US is a hegemonic power within the LIO, making the order based on rules, collective security, and a free economy. The LIO endeavours to make a world where conflicts can be resolved amicably, trade without barriers, and work together to mitigate global concerns. Over a period of time, it contributed to economic progress, the spread of democracy, and relative peace among major powers.

The security order, the economic order, and the human rights order are the three primary orders that make up the LIO. The rule-based security system supports international law by limiting the actions of states. Globalisation, reciprocity in trade, and openness are all linked to the economic order. The human rights order is enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Kundnani 2017). Furthermore, Ikenberry (2018) states that the LIO deals with economic openness and trade exchange, enabling economic development, knowledge flow, and interdependence among states. Because the LIO is founded on set rules, states are able to participate in international relations while honouring their domestic obligations. The LIO calls for nations to encourage alliances in order to improve their security. It seeks to lead nations towards economic integration, international collaboration, and progressive democracy.

However, the LIO in the 21st century has encountered challenges and criticisms as the power transition is in the making, with China emerging as a major power rivalling the US's hegemony. Meanwhile, the LIO's contribution is remarkable in promoting rapid globalisation with US aid. Yet, in contemporary global politics, the US position has become shaky because of China's rise. China's meteoric growth has given the confidence to question the leadership style of the US, with political and economic clout, geopolitical and geoeconomic ambitions, and propagating alternative order for global governance in lieu of the US-led LIO.

China's Perspectives on the Liberal International Order

The advancement of China is making the LIO redundant with an option of China's development model. China's ascendancy is changing the balance of power structurally of the world order and paving the way for a multipolar order. China's rapid economic progress,

decisive international policy, and strategic objectives are head-on collisions with liberal ideology, undermining the unipolarity required to maintain the LIO. Global institutions and norms have changed due to China's pre-eminence, and scepticism about LIO is now in place, which has stimulated the rise of realist-based international dynamics (Mearsheimer 2019). The US, architect and guarantor of LIO, now faces a peer competitor that is economically powerful and ideologically distinct.

China views the post-WWII international order as a system established jointly by the international community, centred around the UN and based on the UN Charter's principles and spirit. China does not fully accept the characterisation of this order as an LIO formed predominantly by the US. China stresses the importance of respecting other countries' right to choose their development trajectory independently and the need for reforms within the existing international order to accommodate the interests of developing countries. China's perception of the international order is diverse, with different schools of thought within China holding varying views on how China should engage with the Western-led LIO. Revolutionary School rejects the LIO in favour of building a socialist order. Linkage School holds a favourable view of the existing international order and calls for reform within it. Traditionalist schools view China's rise as a rejuvenation of traditional Chinese civilisation and offer alternative options beyond the Western model in the international order (Masayuki 2023).

China's notion of liberalism differs from that of Western powers and their allies. China is not a supporter of liberalism, neither internationally nor domestically. While the US and its Western allies support liberal values in international relations, such as democracy, human rights, and a liberal market economy, China remains firmly politically and economically controlled by the state. China does not support the liberal democratic model and has not shown an interest in promoting liberalism as a universal ideology. China's merger into the LIO is driven by its national interests and the benefits it gains from participation rather than a shared belief in liberal values (Dams and Putten 2015). Chinese political system is one-party rule, led by the Communist Party, with limited political discourse and a focus on maintaining social order through the state apparatus. Growth and development proliferated because China adopted a market economy with state capitalism.

China's interaction with the LIO is a dual approach of both reform and resistance. One, China's participation in economic and security sectors, such as the WTO, IMF, and United Nations Security Council (UNSC), is looking to elevate its status as a major power while facilitating

reforms that promote fairness and equality. Simultaneously, China questions the existing norms and institutions that it perceives as biased or unrepresentative of non-Western countries. Thus, building alternative forums, like the Boao Forum for Asia, the New Development Bank (NDB), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are examples that are engaging in institutional proliferation to expand its influence. Through this multipronged strategy, China desires to remould the international order that caters to China's interests, blending cooperative engagement with assertive actions to assert its power and influence globally (Mukherjee 2022).

Xi Jinping, the President of China, views the LIO critically. He criticises the US-led security alliance system that supports the order as having a Cold War mentality that is outdated. Xi Jinping also vilifies democratic values, considering them a Western conspiracy against the global south. Despite this criticism, Xi Jinping has pledged support for the international system with the UN at its core and has shown accord for economic globalisation, free trade, and the development of the global south. This indicates a complex relationship where China both opposes and participates in aspects of the LIO (Cheung 2023). Jinping's criticisms of the LIO dwell on the broader aspects of positioning China as an alternative global leader, particularly for developing countries in the global south. China argues that the LIO, led by Western powers, fails to represent the interests and values of non-Western nations, often imposing a one-size-fits-all model of governance that disregards cultural and political diversity.

China is convinced that the US-led rule-based international order is designed to benefit the U.S. and its allies, prompting Beijing to recommend reforms that sync with its national interests. China, as a major player in the existing international order, seeks to drive the evolution and adaptation of the order to accommodate its growing power and interests better, aiming to have a more vital role in reshaping global rules and standards over time (McGregor 2023). The vision of a liberal order with Chinese characteristics visualises a future wherein a China-led regional order mixes liberal elements with Chinese preferences. In this model, China is seen as a reformer within the international system, working to modify present institutions. Chinese model acknowledges national sovereignty, favouring the protection of sovereignty in international law and respecting civilisational differences by accommodating diverse cultural norms. It also proposes a strict non-interference doctrine, opposing foreign interference in the domestic affairs of states. At the same time, China's objective is to influence international legal norms, furthering its perspectives and denouncing existing universalist principles (Dengler 2021).

Liberal International Order with Chinese Characteristics

China's model of international order is distinguished by a more Westphalian conception, where state sovereignty and non-interference are paramount. In this model, liberal notions of individual rights are downplayed or dismissed. China's vision of the international order draws on parts of the UN charter and emphasises principles such as state sovereignty. Despite this focus on sovereignty, China also campaigns for multilateralism and is involved in extensive trade, investment, and collaboration on transnational issues like climate change (Walt and Agrawal 2021). China's order-building activities include creating new norms and institutions while also attempting to orient established practices to its liking. These measures range from informal regional forums to formal inter-governmental organisations like the AIIB (Stephen 2024). China's strategy for the international order, while founded in traditional principles of sovereignty, denotes its wish to shape world politics in tandem with Chinese interests.

China aspires to increase its control, adjust rules in its favour, and change aspects of the order that it considers as undermining its interests. The Chinese model involves supporting some aspects of the existing order, mainly those centred on the UN, while challenging norms related to liberal democracy and human rights. China vies to play a more authoritative role in moulding an international political and economic order that it views as more just, equitable, fair, democratic, and representative. This approach indicates that China's strategy towards the international order is compounded and designed to strengthen its interests without completely overturning the current system (Rapp 2019). In crux, China's model of liberal order is a combination of continuity and alteration, seeking to protect constituents of the present LIO while gradually changing it to encompass its national interests.

Yan Xuetong points out that disillusionment with the liberal order is influenced by the hypocrisy and incompetence of US leadership, particularly in terms of double standards in foreign policy and failures of leadership both domestically and internationally (Larson 2022). China's envision of a multipolar world order is identified by a rejection of Western-centric norms and a focus on non-interference in internal affairs. While prescribing a more equitable and inclusive international system, China intends to confront the dominance of universal values like democracy and liberalism. China's strategy entails leveraging its economic clout via initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its diplomatic power through organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to shape a post-Western global landscape. By offering to

replace the present platforms for cooperation and development, China strives to alter the norms of the world order and weaken Western-led institutions (Veldkamp 2024).

In 2004, Joshua Cooper Ramo christened the term Beijing Consensus to denote China's development model. The Beijing Consensus is a set of ideas and principles China promotes as an alternative development and international relations model. It diverges from the Washington Consensus by emphasising individual well-being, innovation, equity, and cultural localisation. The impact of the Beijing Consensus on the international order includes challenging Western institutions, questioning global governance, providing new development models, changing power dynamics, and promoting innovation, sustainability, and equality as key drivers of growth and stability (Ramo 2004).

The BRI is China's development model and is a liberal project that challenges the US-led world order by promoting liberal values and principles such as peace, cooperation, openness, inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. It aims to create a more inclusive and transformative world order based on win-win cooperation and connectivity among countries along the BRI. It serves as an institutional countering mechanism against the US-dominated liberal order. The BRI envisages a multipolar world order with liberal values, attempting to reform the operating liberal order towards a more equitable and inclusive system (Endaylalu 2022). The AIIB projects itself with liberal values by improving governance, transparency, and decision-making procedures similar to established international financial institutions. The AIIB operates on a consensus-based system ensuring alignment with liberal norms. In spite of China's notable power in the AIIB, the institution functions to be pro-development and beneficial for developing countries, a commitment to the liberal international order (Atli and Akar 2020). Thus, Chinese-led, BRI and AIIB actively contribute to liberal values with inclusiveness and fairness.

Xi Jinping has ushered in a new era characterised by a more assertive and proactive game plan in the world fora. This marks a departure from the policies of Deng Xiaoping, who advocated for a more restrained and low-profile strategy, emphasising patience and waiting for a more suitable time to assert China's influence. China's BRI is an endorsement of China's contribution to international openness and development. China's multilateral collaboration, such as the SCO, is an effort to bring credible outcomes in its quest for leadership. China's firm stance on contentious issues, such as the South China Sea, border tensions with India, and increasing criticism of the European Union (EU) and the US, is a prominent call for China's new type of

great power relations (Stanzel et al. 2017). Xi Jinping's era inclines to elevate itself in the international standing. However, this has led to conflict of interests with other global powers, particularly in areas where China's interests clash with those of the EU, the US, and neighbouring countries.

US-China Strategic Gambit

China suggests a new type of great power relations between the US and China based on power equilibrium. These would comprise achieving a balance of power, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation to avoid disagreement. The great power relations underline the need for both countries to navigate power transitions cautiously, address conflicts of interest with sagaciousness, and collaborate for world stability and development. Also, it underscores avoiding misunderstandings and managing disputes with adeptness (Hao 2015). This new type of great power relations seeks to establish a constructive and cooperative relationship between the two powers, recognising their interdependence and the potential consequences of their rivalry. However, the US is apprehensive about granting China parity within the LIO and has devised a strategy to slow or prevent China from emerging as a formidable power.

President Obama emphasised China's role in international norms by stressing that, as the world's most populous country and the second-largest economy, China must abide by international norms rather than simply acting in its own best interests (Feng n.d.). Thereby launching the Pivot to Asia strategy to counteract the rise of China in the Indo-Pacific region and keep China within the US-led LIO. The US rebalancing act is enhancing its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by strengthening bilateral security alliances, deepening relationships with emerging powers, engaging with regional multilateral institutions such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), expanding trade and investment, modernising military presence, and supporting democratic institutions and human rights across the region (Saunders 2014). President Obama used a hedging strategy in dealing with China, balancing between engagement and containment to manage the rise of China (Garrison and Wall 2016).

The US has retained its global hegemony and aided world stability. The Hegemonic Stability Theory stresses the significance of dominant power in preserving order and stability in the international system. Charles P. Kindleberger (1973) asserts that hegemonic power is essential for regulating a liberal international economy. The hegemonic power is obligated to fulfil several key roles that facilitate global trade as responsibilities including taking proactive

measures to keep markets open during periods of economic downturn, leading efforts to liberalise trade policies, overseeing international financial institutions and the global monetary system, providing a stable international currency, ensuring liquidity within the LIO structure, providing stable exchange rates, ensuring capital availability, and cultivating development in peripheral regions of the global order. Thus far, the US has acted as a stabilising force, developing an environment conducive to globalisation.

However, Donald Trump's presidency marked a watershed moment in a departure from traditional US foreign policy. The Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the TPP, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) represented a retreat from multilateralism and the world's leadership. Trump's America First policy, also signified the US abandonment of its world leadership by prioritising its national interests. The Trump administration's preferences on domestic issues and its demands from NATO for more contributions to strengthening collective security have strained its relationships with allies. The construction of the border wall exemplified xenophobia sentiment, which has eroded the US reputation as the champion of democratic rights. Trump's foreign policy is distinctive because of its unpredictability and unilateralism, focusing on prioritising US interests over more extensive interests of the world. Trump views China as an adversary, advocating the implementation of tariffs and restrictions on trade and technology, a stance he would likely continue if re-elected (Nye 2024).

US President Joe Biden's stratagem towards China consists of competition, cooperation, and confrontation, a variance from Trump's all-encompassing decoupling policy. The approach includes coalition building, economic and technological competition, human rights and democracy conflict, and military and security confrontation. Biden is revitalising alliances with Japan, South Korea, the EU, and NATO and participating in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) - a membership by the US, India, Japan and Australia. This strategy reflects a continuation of Trump's hawkish policies but with greater importance on coalition-driven competition (Li 2021). Biden has increased tariffs on \$18 billion of Chinese imports, targeting sectors like steel, semiconductors, and electric vehicles. The tariffs aim to counter China's unfair trade practices, while significant investments are being made in clean energy, semiconductors, and Electric Vehicles (EVs). The US government also bolsters supply chain security (The White House 2024). As well as the Biden administration is implementing export controls on advanced technologies and reducing dependency on China for rare earth materials.

The US is vocal about human rights abuses in the Xinjiang province of China and advocates for stronger democratic norms. At the same time, Biden has strengthened Taiwan's defence and increased military aid to deter Chinese sabre-rattling.

China has been steadfast in its claim over the South China Sea and East China Sea, escalating tension with the claimant countries such as the Philippines and Japan. China's military drill frequency close to Taiwan has increased. Beijing has maintained that China's territorial integrity is non-negotiable. The Chinese liberal order would be on its terms and conditions as its rise is imminent, and the US interest in protecting LIO has witnessed a manoeuvre for dominance in the Indo-Pacific between the US and China. The decline of US political clout is observed in the protracted Ukraine-Russia war without conclusive results. The influence of the US is waning. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Mongolia in September 2024 despite an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Mongolia ignored the ICC warrant, although being a member signifies the Western order in the decline mode. Another area where the US leadership is found wanting is the Israel-Palestine conflict. The latest episode of conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza started in October 2023 and is on the verge of transforming into a full-scale regional war. The US's leadership role in resolving the present crisis is negligible.

Implications of Chinese-Characterised Liberal International Order

At present, China has gained more influence in international institutions and provides an alternative model and the balance of power could shift away from the US. This would build a multipolar world where China's interests are more prominently represented. China's objection to liberal democracy and its human rights action, such as the oppression of the Uyghurs, could undermine global human rights standards and embolden other authoritarian regimes to follow suit (Jones and Yeo 2022). China's interaction with the liberal world order is not simply a matter of conflict or co-optation. Instead, it involves a hybrid scenario where China both adapts to and confronts liberal institutions according to the situation. China has a model of state-permeated capitalism. Thus, the state plays a significant role in directing economic activity and presents a challenge to the liberal order's norms and rules. This model is sometimes referred to as "Sino-capitalism." The negotiation and contestation between China and the US will be crucial in shaping the global order (Graaff, Brink, and Parmar 2020).

The growing influence of China is likely to exacerbate tensions with the US, leading to increased competition and potential conflicts in various domains, including trade, technology,

and military. China's significant economic growth and initiatives like the BRI could reshape global trade and economic relations, increasing China's influence over global economic policies and practices (Rashid and Ghouri 2021). The ongoing discussion among the BRICS states for de-dollarisation to reduce dependency on the dollar for international financial transactions could decimate dollar hegemony. China has developed a rival system to SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) called CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System) to facilitate international financial transactions in Chinese yuan. China is a member of Project mBridge connecting the central bank of different countries and promoting digital currency transactions. The combination of these initiatives highlights China's strategic intent to challenge the U.S.-dominated financial and economic order while positioning itself as a leader in a multipolar world.

The hint of a Chinese-characterised LIO is found in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, also known as *Panchsheel*, which prioritises state sovereignty and non-interference over ideological alignment or political system homogeneity. Unlike the US-led LIO, which gives weightage to democratic governance and liberal values, the Chinese-characterised LIO promotes mutual respect and equitable development, basing its engagement on pragmatism rather than prescriptive. This approach is evident in China's relations with the Myanmar junta government, where it has taken on a leadership role to mediate between the regime and armed rebel groups, such as the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). China projected itself as a stabilising power in the region and elevated its influence by brokering talks between the junta and the rebels. China's leadership role transcends beyond its immediate neighbourhood, as it negotiated a peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2023, which restored full diplomatic relations. China taking responsibility to mediate supports China's desire to present itself as an alternative leader in global governance, capable of handling complex geopolitical disputes.

In the case of India vis-a-vis LIO, India upholds a rules-based international order, acknowledging the advantage of international security, stability, and fair economic engagement. Also, India is a defender of its national sovereignty and has argued that the liberal economic system has not always offered a level playing field (Jaishankar 2023). India has also shown support for the international order by advocating for peaceful settlements and engaging in multilateral forums like the QUAD. India seeks to navigate a nonaligned path in the emerging multipolar world, balancing its actions to avoid great-power competition and

maintain stability (Grossman 2022). India has been a strong supporter of UN peacekeeping operations, contributing significantly to such missions, but remains opposed to transforming peacekeeping into peace enforcement without explicit UN authorisation (Ganguly 2013). India's approach to the LIO is pragmatic engagement while seeking to adapt it to reflect contemporary geopolitical and economic realities. This method depicts India's inclinations to frame the world order in a way that corresponds with its national interests. Thereby, contributes to world peace and development. India's balancing act with the existing order with its own strategic priorities, a quest to create a role for itself in the emerging international order.

While Russia's approach to the liberal international order is neo-revisionist. This means that Russia does not seek to completely dismantle the order but rather to revise it to better suit its own interests. It promotes parallel structures, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and BRICS, to foster alternatives to Western dominance (Romanova 2018). Russia's approach has transformed into antagonism against the LIO. This opposition is due to events like NATO's eastward expansion, Western interventions in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya, and the perceived infringement on Russia's region of dominance. Russia's confrontationalist standpoint is reflected in its foreign policy decisions, which directly challenge the liberal order. These include the annexation of Crimea, intervention in Syria, and support for authoritarian regimes (Morozov 2023). Russia rejects the liberal humanism and economic neoliberalism that emerged in the late 1990s, viewing them as anti-pluralists and as threats to state sovereignty. Russians are critical of the US-led order, which they perceive as "collective unilateralism" rather than true multilateralism (Clunan 2018). By rejecting the universal applicability of liberal norms, Russia positions itself as a defender of state sovereignty and cultural pluralism, appealing to states dissatisfied with the current order.

The Future Prospects of the Liberal International Order

Joseph Nye contends that while the liberal order is under severe strain from a combination of populist movements, geopolitical challenges, and shifting power dynamics, it is not necessarily on the point of collapse. The order's resilience, particularly in terms of security alliances, and the importance of international cooperation suggest that it may survive, albeit in a modified form. Nye suggests that the LIO should adapt the system to changing realities while preserving its core principles (Nye 2016). Ikenberry argues that while China's rise challenges the liberal world order, it does not necessarily threaten its existence. China has benefitted from the order and is more likely to seek reform and greater influence within it than to destroy it outright. The

future of the liberal order, therefore, lies in its ability to adapt and accord China with the status it deserves and construct a more inclusive, multipolar system where liberal principles can endure (Ikenberry 2011).

Colgan and Keohane (2017) propose that the liberal order can be protected if it is reformed to become more equitable, inclusive, and democratic. The key is to address the economic, social, and political grievances that have fuelled populist movements and restore faith in the system by making it work for a broader population segment. Without the reforms, Colgan and Keohane predict, the LIO could continue to weaken, leading to increased political instability and a possible collapse of international order. The growth of China necessitates reforms in the world order framework to give place to China's aspiration. The order must enlarge to co-opt rising powers, giving China a prominent role in shaping international norms. The international order without the reformation will continue to tussle with the Chinese assertive behaviour unless its interests are taken into account.

The answer to the US-China rivalry lies in reforming the LIO to merge both the US and Chinese interests, which include a dual leadership structure in decision-making and promote the current power dynamics. It is propounded that a reorganisation of the established order, which acknowledges the changes in world power distribution and responds to modern transnational challenges, is the criteria for a viable cooperative relationship between the two major powers (Donduran 2023). In order to maintain global stability, the international system must adapt to the ascendancy of China. Thus, incorporating China into shared leadership and global institutions would be effective in consolidating the structure of the LIO. Therefore, it requires the restructuring of rules and norms to ensure that different nations' systems are respected and that unilateral dominance is avoided. Successful reform can alleviate disagreement and nurture cooperation. The grievances of China need to be addressed. Otherwise, antagonism will surge, destabilising international relations and hindering efforts to address global problems.

In China, there are two perspectives prevailing regarding the LIO. The first opinion is that of beneficiaries and reformers who argue that China has benefitted from the present LIO and advocates for reform rather than overhauling it. These scholars affirm that China should work with other major powers to build a more equitable and just order, directing the world towards multipolarity. The second standpoint is critical reformers who take a more sceptical position, reasoning that the order is dysfunctional, lacks legitimacy, and is too Western-oriented. Thus advocating for China to propose an alternative framework that addresses global challenges and

fosters a more inclusive order based on traditional Chinese values (Liu and Yang 2023). This outlook demonstrates the intricacies of China's relationship with the LIO and its perplexity in tackling it with prudence. The divergent views point out the ongoing debate in China about the future of the LIO led by the US and China's role in shaping it. Eventually, the solution to this debate will depend on how Chinese leadership understands the evolving international power transition and engages with the issues it faces.

China is searching for a liberal partnership order based on mutual respect, cooperation, and shared benefits among major powers, recognising the rising influence of non-Western powers like China. China is a responsible stakeholder in the world order, contributing to its development and stability. China acknowledges the importance of institutional reforms to make international institutions more inclusive and representative of changing global power dynamics. The reformed order would depart from the traditional hierarchical structure of the established system and recognise the rising influence of non-Western powers like China (Xinbo 2018). This opined that China's model of international order is one that is inclusive, accommodative, and equitable, depicting the changing balance of power in the world. The endorsement of a liberal partnership order means China is willing to cooperate with other major powers to develop the global community and promote shared prosperity. However, it is also clear that China expects to play a more prominent role in forming the future of the world order, and it is likely to continue to push for reforms that reflect its national interests.

Conclusion

China's commitment to multilateralism and equitable global economic order is based on the principles of consultation on an equal footing, mutual benefit, inclusiveness, market-driven operations, and sustainability, which are central to China's vision of a new LIO. China wants to reform the global governance system and position itself as a leader in a just, rule-based, and non-discriminatory international system. The possibility of China carving an LIO in its image is becoming increasingly plausible as the growth of China is optimistic for the foreseeable future. To maintain its global dominance, the US must develop a coherent strategy to counter the rise of China, as reactive measures such as trade wars would be insufficient to subdue the rise of China. China does not seek to defile US dominance outright but instead demands parity in international politics. While the US has often resorted to interventionist policies and interference in the internal affairs of other nations, China views such actions with disapproval.

China has intimated a new order for the 21st century by offering an alternative development model to the West with liberal norms. Chinese leadership seeks to foster an open global economy, support multilateralism, and make globalisation more inclusive and equitable. China agrees with the idea of a liberal international order where power is distributed more equally among states, promoting cooperative relationships, particularly between China and the US, based on mutual respect and equality. For example, the US-led international financial institutions, like the IMF and WB, operate under a weighted voting system which consolidates decision-making power in the hands of wealthier nations, especially the U.S. This voting structure reinforces a hierarchical order that represents the interests of powerful states. Unlike the US-led institutions, Chinese-led multilateral financial institutions, like the AIIB and the NDB, operate based on equality, adhering to the principle of one country, one vote.

Thus, China's objective is to secure a global position that allows its economy to continue thriving while preserving its political system. The BRI serves as a strategic tool for expanding China's influence and showcasing its development model, suggesting that Western models are not the only path to modernisation and progress. China supports cooperation based on mutual interests and shared benefits to induce and foster national trade without imposing conditions. Countries wary of the US policies may find China a more attractive option as it promises economic investment without political strings attached. China's calls for cooperation and respect for diversity have made it appealing to states needing infrastructure development and economic growth. As the US turns inward and disengages from international institutions, countries may gravitate toward China, viewing it as a better alternative. The LIO with Chinese characteristics is a manifestation of a new LIO that promotes multilateralism, equality, and cooperation over hegemonic dominance, which would prevail in days to come if the US does not act decisively to avert China's rise.

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India-Russia Cooperation in the Far East in the Changing Global Context

The Significance of Eastern Economic Forum

Dr. Samrita Das

Abstract

This paper analyses the evolving relationship between India and Russia, focusing on their cooperation in Russia's Far East. It examines the historical context of their partnership, highlighting periods of both closeness and distance, shaped by geopolitical shifts and national priorities. The paper specifically explores the significance of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) as a platform for enhancing bilateral economic and strategic cooperation, particularly in light of China's growing influence in the region. The author discusses various opportunities for collaboration, including energy, infrastructure development, and resource extraction in the Russian Far East, ultimately arguing that a strengthened partnership benefits both nations. The paper concludes by suggesting strategies to further enhance this relationship in the face of complex global dynamics.

Introduction

This paper focuses on India-Russia cooperation in the Russian Far East (RFE) and the importance of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF), in this direction. This paper would like to discuss and analyze the cooperation between Russia and India in the contemporary world, the ongoing changes in international circumstances with a new opportunity, and new policy and programs in the Russian Far East. In addition, this paper examines the relevance of the Eastern Economic Forum, future orientations, and the fads and tides of India and Russia's ties in RFE. It tries to evaluate the changes occurring in Russia's and India's foreign policy due to the shifting global backdrop.

Since the end of the Cold War, when they reached a stalemate, India and Russia's relations have made little progress. Today, their bilateral connections are acknowledged as a unique and privileged strategic partnership, with annual summits and a range of interdepartmental

processes for joint government commissions. This bilateral relationship relies mainly on defense cooperation, while the economic partnership has stagnated despite the rapid expansion of the two countries' links with other nations (Kapoor, 2019). During the Soviet period, it was well-known that Russia and India continued their strong ties. Despite the Russian Federation's efforts to reorganize its foreign policy, the Russia-India relationship remained unstable throughout the early post-Soviet years. Upon the fall of the USSR, Boris Yeltsin's Russia adopted a pro-Western position. Meanwhile, India liberalized its economy and turned to the West for economic development. Consequently, both nations were preoccupied with internal concerns while transitioning to a new international system headed by the United States (Abdullah, 2016).

Following that, efforts were made to rekindle the relationship between Russia and India. Then in 1993, a 'Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation' was signed by them, which was used to achieve its military and technical cooperation objectives. India will ultimately become the biggest importer of Russian armaments between 1990 and 1993, when the number of military shipments dropped precipitously (Kortunov, 2019). In the 1990s, disagreements over the rupee-ruble exchange rate and the repayment of debts due by India persisted. By 1996, commerce between the two nations had decreased. Even cultural and interpersonal connections decreased (Singh, 1995; Tsan, 2012).

The bilateral partnership was created in 2000, at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's presidency. In 2001, some of India's state energy companies, like Oil Videsh Limited and the Indian Oil and Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), made big investments in the Sakhalin-1 Oil field (Rahm, 2001). It is India's biggest foreign Oil industry investment. Russia and India agreed in 2004 to jointly explore the Caspian Sea for natural gas. Russia and India initiated annual summits, which resulted in a redoubling of efforts.

Furthermore, the two nations entered a strategic alliance, which was upgraded to a 'special and privileged strategic partnership' ten years later. So, the relations between the nations have grown from strength to strength. Since then, India has desired to engage in Russia's oil and gas reserves, especially offshore projects (Jeh, 2015). Russia and India issued a joint statement in 2010 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of their 'Declaration on Strategic Partnership.' In the statement, the two countries acknowledged their relationship had advanced to a 'privileged and exclusive strategic partnership' (Ministry of External Affairs, 2019). Therefore, determining

the multidimensional connection has been lengthy and has had to fight geopolitical and geo-economic upheavals worldwide and regionally (Roy, 2016).

In 2017, the nation marked 70 years of diplomatic relations between Russia and India. Through these 70 years, the bilateral relationship between Russia and India acquired certain strength and distinctiveness and stood up to the challenges of time. How the Russia-India relationship will grow in the changing period is predictably something that we will outline in this chapter. What has also been sustained as an integral part of the emerging cooperation between the two countries' mutual trust and understanding, leading to pragmatism? (Bhagwat, 2020).

In 2018, on three different occasions, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin met three times: at the informal summit at Sochi in May, at Johannesburg on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in July, and during the 19th Annual Summit in October in Delhi. The visit of President Putin to India is a comparative statement in terms of a roadmap between Russia and India. Both leaders share a close relationship of trust and confidence. From the above facts, it is clear that these regular interactions have provided an opportunity for free and frank discussions between them on all issues (Bacon, 2018). As we all know, the Russia-India relationship has traditionally enjoyed cooperation in defense, space, and civil nuclear energy spheres. Russia is one of the largest defense partners of India. Russia is the strength of India's strategic cooperation in the defense sector. In space, respective agencies on both sides also cooperate closely (Azizian, 2004).

Russia and India have acknowledged at the state level that their partnership is mutually beneficial. Moreover, despite changes in the international landscape, both nations have sought to maintain a high degree of mutual understanding. In 2000, the promptness and regularity of Russia-India summits were shown. However, this exclusive aspect of bilateral connections has not hindered Russia and India's extensive links at many levels, whether in commerce, culture, education, media, or people-to-people interactions in general (Boese, 2000).

Today, India surpasses many ways, most outstandingly economically. Contemporary India is a country with global ambitions determined to retain its leading position in Asia and obtain its equitable place globally. The fact that Moscow and New Delhi always support each other for their global aspirations is an important driver of the Russia-India relationship. Even though Russia's policy towards India has yet to be elaborated, the strategic relationship with India is

based on sustainable interaction in such domains as global governance, defense cooperation, and energy (Lunev and Shavlay, 2018).

Moreover, connections between Russia and India have not been restricted to the energy and defense industries. While defense has been the greatest pillar of bilateral cooperation, there are other sectors in which the two nations engage, including culture, commerce, transportation, education, science and technology, space, civil nuclear, etc. Aside from that, India continues to place a premium on Russia's Far East. India's commerce with the RFE region grew by more than three percent in 2018, reaching US \$790 million, while its overall trade with Russia surpassed \$10 billion. By 2025, Russia and India want to attain a bilateral trade volume of \$30 billion (Christoffersen, 2021).

Exploring new opportunities: Russia-India Partnership in the Far East

The shifting international landscape typified by China's ascent and its influence on the larger regional and global order puts stress and worry on Russia and India's relationship. In 2012, Russian President Putin referred to India as a vital strategic partner in the 'Asia-Pacific region,' increasing its relevance given Asia and China's growing importance. This plan prompts a reevaluation of the two countries' relationship, although India had a prominent role at the APEC meeting when Moscow's pivot to Asia was reaffirmed.

However, successive events have led to a deepening of the strategic alliance between Russia and China. This is because Russia and China share common interests in the political, economic, and strategic sectors. On the other hand, a comparable level of engagement with other Asian states has not been achieved. This more prominent Russian policy shortcoming in Asia also affects India, and India is not immune from it. In contrast to East Asia, Russia's history with India since its independence is extensive (Lukin, 2018).

Bilateral considerations are insufficient to explain why the potential of the strategic alliance has not been fulfilled, and Russia-China relations have been a significant influence in this regard. In this scenario, some Russian academics think that the Russian government has realized that collaboration with the West cannot be completely restored after 2014, resulting in a profound shift toward China. In addition to bilateral trade that topped \$100 billion in 2018, Russia needs investment from China to satisfy its economic needs. Russia and China place equal importance on respecting each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, internal affairs, equality, and mutual benefit. As a consequence of the Ukraine crisis and the annexation of

Crimea, Russia was compelled to seek a powerful foreign ally, which resulted in a more aggressive turn toward China (Amaresh, 2022).

On the economic front in 2015-2016, Russia surpassed Saudi Arabia as China's leading oil exporter at times, loosened restrictions on Chinese investment in energy and infrastructure projects, signed the largest-ever USD 400 billion gas deal, proposed a connection between the EEU and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) after initial Russian reluctance, and increased cooperation in Central Asia. All of these accomplishments occurred during the period. These accomplishments occurred in the same period (*Business Standard*, 2022).

In 2016, based on the concept of shared principles that guide Russia's foreign policy, Russia concluded that developing cooperation with China would be most beneficial to Russia's national interests, given the state of affairs in the world at the time. In contrast, it must also be understood that India's economic constraints and geopolitical objectives would make it difficult to provide comparable help to Russia.⁸

Moreover, these interactions and advances between Russia and China happened when India was firmly reaching out to the United States, distancing itself from the "rhetoric of non-alignment," resulting in one of the most intensive bilateral relationships India had with any country. In 2018, India initiated the 2+2 discussion and signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). In 2016, India became a significant defense partner of the USA and signed the "Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement" (LEMOA). In addition, the concept of the "Indo-Pacific" was gaining traction in 2017, as the Indo-US joint declaration formally included the term in the bilateral treaty (Tellis, 2018).

In the meanwhile, allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections widened the rift that was already there between Russia and the USA. India has shown little interest in helping Russia's goal to undermine U.S. supremacy as it seeks to improve its economic stature and relations with all major countries. India's connections with other major countries, notably Germany, France, Japan, and Israel, have been strengthened. In the case of Japan, which was creating its notion of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP), this has

⁸The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2016", Accessed July 19, 2019.

included a focus on its relationship with India. The two nations have also made significant measures to establish a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” fuelled by economic complementarities and fears about China’s rise (Trenin, 2015).

In 2014, Japan agreed to spend USD 33.6 billion over five years on infrastructure and energy sectors, which are essential to India’s economic goals. Seeing synergies between India’s Act East plan and the FOIP, both parties engage in several Asia-Africa Growth Corridor connecting projects. Since 2015, trilateral discussions between the foreign secretaries of India, Japan, and Australia have facilitated progress. The presidents of Japan, America, and India (JAI) met for the first time in 2018 on the sidelines of the G20 conference after the 2017 formal official-level conversations under the Quad framework (Panda, 2018).

After the JAI conference, the first trilateral summit of Russia, India, and China (RIC) in 12 years took place. Nonetheless, the trilateral (RIC), which meets periodically at the level of foreign ministers, has only had so-called levels of collaboration during its early stages, and the three presidents are likely to meet again in 2019 on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Osaka (*The Diplomat*, 2018).

An increased emphasis on India’s connections with the United States and Russia’s contacts with China has resulted in a continuous expansion of the economic partnership. In 2018, both countries’ trade-in products were \$87.5 billion, while trade between Russia and China reached \$107.06 billion. Russia and India’s respective foreign policy trends during the last decade are shown in the graph above. If it continues, the resulting divergences will only grow.

India’s economic interests in the Far East region of Russia are complementary to Russian needs. Because Russia needs finance, markets, technological resources, and labour resources, while India requires energy and minerals, the RFE is of geopolitical, economic, and strategic importance to India. India must have a strong economic and strategic presence in this prosperous region of Russia. The RFE is at the forefront of Indo-Pacific-centered geopolitics and is essential to the pivot to Asia. Additionally, the region’s border with China is one of the longest in the world. Therefore, India’s presence in these regions will aid China’s economic and geopolitical confrontation.

As is well-known, the history, mutual trust, and mutually beneficial cooperation that underlie India and Russia’s ties have enabled this strategic alliance to withstand the test of time and

garner the support of the citizens of both countries. Russia has several investment opportunities, notably in the Far East. If India capitalizes on Russia's Far East, it might become a booming market for Indian companies. In the region, the Russian Far East is economically and strategically significant for India (Minakir, 2017).

Gateway to East Asia

India's relationship with Russia's Far East might strengthen its relationships with Central Asia and East Asia as well as with Russia. It would link India with East Asia, particularly Japan, so Russia and India may collaborate with nations such as Japan and Korea to encourage joint exploration investments in Russia's Far East (Wilson and Bagot, 2011).

Economic Opportunities

The region that comprises 40 percent of Russia's total land area is rich in diamonds, gold, oil, natural gas, coal, wood, silver, platinum, tin, lead, and zinc. It also offers excellent fishing areas. The region is economically undeveloped without efficient infrastructure and connectivity. Improved connectivity is the key to India's ability to access these resources. In the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region, India has been emphasizing the need for investments in shipping and ports and creating a Blue Economy. India's expanding economic relations with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China have made Northeast Asia an essential geoeconomic region for India's growth. The Russian Far East offers India substantial economic benefits and is only a step away (*Press Trust of India*, 2022).

Employment Opportunities

It is one of the significant issues that the Russian Far East is now confronting because there is a shortage of skilled labour, and Indian professionals such as surgeons, engineers, and teachers might help the expansion of the area. In addition, the presence of Indian labour in the area will assist in easing Russian fears against immigration from China. There is a possibility that India, one of the major importers of wood in the world, would uncover considerable resources in the area. In addition, investments have been made by Japan and South Korea, and New Delhi may investigate potential opportunities for a joint partnership (Pravakaran, 2021).

Strategic Importance

The Russian Far East is at the forefront of Indo-Pacific-centered geopolitics and is crucial to the pivot to Asia. The region that borders the Chinese provinces is among the world's longest.

Being present in these places may compete economically and strategically with China (Ramachandran, 2019).

Energy Resources

The region's abundant hydrocarbon deposits provide huge prospects for Indian businesses. Already engaged in the Sakhalin-1 project, ONGC Videsh's terminal is recognized as the finest in Russia. India is scheduled to receive natural gas from Gazprom, which will likely be liquefied at a facility near Vladivostok (Minakir, 2017).

Small Scale Industries

Small and medium-sized firms in India have enormous growth potential and should be encouraged to overcome linguistic and cultural hurdles so they may effectively embrace local business practices. Large diamond deposits in the region should attract the Indian diamond cutting and polishing business, which is already competing with the Chinese (Baru, 2019).

Manufacturing Industries

Infrastructure, medicines, and agricultural development are all sectors where Indian enterprises and labour might find opportunities. Telemedicine and long-distance education are two further fields where Indian businesses may make an impact. It would also contribute to the expansion of India's exports. Thus, it is crucial and timely for India to engage in the Russian Far East, a region that may determine the future dynamics of contact between significant powers in the Indo-Pacific (Kumar, 2019).

Likewise, the 'Act Far East' strategy will enable India to invest in the region. This scheme would allow India to increase its maritime commerce with other European countries through the Arctic route and maritime trade with Russia. India may diversify its dependence on West Asian countries to satisfy its energy requirements. Minerals and energy are plentiful in the region of the Far East. This strategy will let India access the Arctic region, which is also rich in energy resources, through the route to the Far East. This diversification will provide India with various energy supply alternatives. The approach will also help Russia, in addition to India. China's influence in the region of the Far East has grown. With the execution of this program, Russia will have the opportunity to diversify its commercial partnerships with Japan and India, among others. It is because Japan, like India, wants to develop its political and

economic ties with Russia. This action will surely give Russia the chance to retain a healthy dependence on China (Mohanty and Kumar, 2019).

Given the increasing significance of Indo-Pacific geopolitics, India's determination to preserve a close connection with its old friend will be vital for the two countries as the U.S.-China trade war continues. The 'Act Far East' strategy would allow the two countries to improve their alliance and expand their diplomatic and economic links. Given the increasing significance of Indo-Pacific geopolitics, India's determination to preserve a close connection with its old friend will be vital for the two countries as the U.S.-China trade war continues (Baruah, 2020).

The 'Act Far East' strategy would allow the two countries to improve their alliance and expand their diplomatic and economic links. In addition to the possibilities mentioned above, external elements are also complex in geopolitical situations and prone to rapid change, which provides obstacles. While there are no active conflicts in the bilateral partnership, external forces can no longer be disregarded or undervalued. Since 2014, China has become Russia's most important foreign ally owing to persistent tensions with the United States-led West. Despite this, India's ties with an increasingly assertive China have deteriorated. The Trump administration did not impose penalties on Indian corporations, and the Biden administration has not yet decided. Thirdly, it is difficult to ensure that India and Russia's cooperation with other nations does not jeopardize their bilateral relationship in a world that is uncertain and in flux (Mohapatra, 2019).

In this sense, a covert diplomatic operation, such as the one Russia launched last year to bring China and India to the negotiation table amid their border conflicts, is crucial for creating trust and is much more successful than exposing disagreements in public. Urgently necessary is a broader economic engagement, while cooperation in the energy and defense sectors will continue to serve as the basis of the ties. A forward-looking economic agenda should include collaboration in the high-tech sector, biotechnology, nanotechnology, space, start-ups and innovation, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, etc., to maximize the capacities of the two nations. Both US-Russian and India-China ties are not expected to improve shortly. To maintain impartiality on fundamentally essential issues to both parties, it may be prudent to enhance "open and candid" conversations on all issues while strengthening the bilateral relationship. India would benefit from bilateral and international efforts to expand collaboration in the

Russian Far East and the Arctic. Additionally, it may be advantageous to discuss reviving India, Iran, and Russia's alliance with Afghanistan (Singh, 2022).

The event, which focuses on growing business and investment opportunities in the RFE, gives Russia and India an excellent chance to collaborate closely in the Far East region. The resumption of great power rivalry has led to a deterioration in international politics. At a time when the USA is engaged in deglobalization, and China is advocating "Globalization 2.0 with Chinese features", it makes perfect sense for India and Russia to extend their areas of collaboration in trade to defend against disruptive influences and keep their ties durable (Singh, 2022).

In addition, due to China's rise as a powerhouse, the Indo-Pacific area has become a battleground for conflicting interests. The "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia has failed to secure the Indo-Pacific as claimed. It first generated significant interest, but its members have not pursued it with the necessary vigor. Therefore, India would benefit most from a more significant Russian presence. India's longest-standing friend and major defense partner is Russia.

Eastern Economic Forum (EEF): Context and Background

The EEF is an annual international forum started by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2015, soon after relations with the West deteriorated in 2014 as a result of the Ukrainian conflict. In line with the decree, the Eastern Economic Forum is held annually in Vladivostok, promoting the economic growth of Russia's Far East and enhancing regional international collaboration. We may claim that the forum was a commercial occasion for Russia. It functioned within the context of the Russian goal of developing its Far East region and incorporating it into the global economy. Annually, the EEF acts as a forum for the debate on global economic problems relating to economic growth, regional integration, and the creation of new industrial and technology sectors, as well as the global difficulties confronting Russia and other countries. The business region of the event involves conversations with Asia-Pacific and ASEAN nations. Over time, EEF has developed into a forum for fostering political, economic, and cultural links between Russia and the Asia-Pacific region. The main goal of the EEF is to strengthen ties between international investors, Russian businesses, and federal, regional, and local governments. The EEF also wants to fully assess the Russian Far East's economic potential

and make the area more competitive and attractive to investors worldwide. The EEF also aims to increase the region's attractiveness to national and international investors (AVSK, 2019).

In addition, the Eastern Economic Forum serves as a showcase for new investment and commercial prospects, including advanced special economic zones, Vladivostok Free Port, and official assistance for high-potential investment projects. In addition, the Eastern Economic Forum demonstrated how the world's governments were preoccupied with settling domestic issues and addressing existing political disputes. Untimely, it demonstrates that isolation from the events of the outside world was no longer a choice but a necessity (Ellis, 2021).

Geopolitical Context of Formation: Shifting Power to Asia-Pacific

Throughout the Eastern Economic Forum's existence, the forum has evolved into a key international platform for discussing various approaches to fostering economic, political, and cultural ties between Russia and the nations of the Asia-Pacific region. It continues to be an important commercial event for Russia, particularly as the country concentrates on the Far East's growth and its role in the global economy. The conversation occurs between partner countries from the Asia-Pacific region and ASEAN, the most important organization representing Southeast Asian countries. Since then, the forum has gained importance and continues to exert a considerable amount of influence in formulating policy in the region. The Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) highlights the untapped potential of the eastern region of Russia, which is abundant in various minerals and other resources. The EEF focuses on the growth of commercial and investment prospects in the Russian Far East Region, and it gives India and Russia a tremendous opportunity to create a mutually beneficial working relationship in the region.

The presence of Russia in the Indian Ocean is hardly noticeable, whilst India has not yet established any substantial footprints in the Pacific Ocean. India is a powerful nation in the Indian Ocean and has a significant interest in the Pacific Ocean. On the other hand, Russia is a powerful nation in the Pacific Ocean that also has a significant interest in the Indian Ocean. The EEF presents an opportunity for India to safeguard its maritime interests and promote maritime safety in the Pacific area (Chaudhury, 2022).

The sea link between Vladivostok and Chennai can be seen as a challenge to "China's Maritime Silk Route (MSR) plans as part of the One Belt, One Road project (OBOR). The proposed sea

will likely pass through or close to the South China Sea, which China has turned into an international geostrategic hotspot. It would become an extension of the existing India-Japan Pacific to Indian Ocean Corridor, which China considers a challenge to its maritime OBOR plan in the region” (Bordachev, 2019). China has turned the South China Sea into an international geostrategic hotspot (Bogachev, 2019).

When viewed through the perspective of geostrategic considerations, this provides India with another vantage point from which it may resist China’s game of encircling India through a tactic known as the String of Pearls (Dabas, 2017). The Russian Far East is a resource-rich region abundant in a wide variety of natural resources, including oil, natural gas, timber, gold, and diamonds. Exploration of hydrocarbon reserves along the coast of Russia’s Far East is one of the areas of particular interest to India in this regard. As India’s domestic demand continues to rise, the Forum will assist the country in gaining more accessible access to essential resources, namely oil and gas, to meet these demands (Cogan and Mishra, 2022). During the sixth edition of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF), which took place in 2021, the Prime Minister of India gave a speech through video conferencing about the significance of India’s relationship with Russia and discussed areas of cooperation between the two countries.

The EEF and India’s Presence in the RFE

The Russian economic crisis and the country’s issues with its relations with the West occurred concurrently with the growth of the Indian presence in the RFE. Following this, on the eve of the SCO meeting in June 2019, the Russian president publicly extended an invitation to India to participate in the EEF more actively. In 2017, as both countries commemorated 70 years of diplomatic relations, the ‘St. Petersburg International Economic Forum’ (SPIEF) asked the Indian Prime Minister to attend as the Guest of Honor. It was done in preparation for the 2019 Eastern Economic Forum. After then, on May 21, 2018, in Sochi, Russian Federation, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi got together for the first time in a casual setting (Ramachandran, 2019).

Beginning on 12 June 2019, the Indian Prime Minister travelled to Russia for two days to attend the 20th India-Russia annual summit and the 5th EEF in Vladivostok. Russian President Vladimir Putin invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak at the EEF. Since 2015, the EEF has been promoting the business and investment opportunities in the RFE, and the presence of the Indian Prime Minister as the event’s chief guest highlights the role this region

can play in enhancing India and Russia's cooperation in the region and beyond. Moreover, it was anticipated that India would invest in the RFE in various industries, including oil, gas, space, energy, connectivity, and deep-sea exploration (Pant, 2019). Finally, Modi and Putin signed the agreements. Both nations saw the signing of 25 agreements spanning from connectivity to energy and the development of the REF. Important takeaways are:

First, Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. Both leaders pledged to encourage, in every manner possible, the exploration of their strategic relationship's outstanding potential while emphasizing the alliance's unique and privileged character. Second, Russia supports India's decision on Jammu & Kashmir. Russia has supported India's decision over Jammu and Kashmir, stating that the status changes are consistent with the Indian constitution. Both nations underscored the supremacy of international law and their adherence to the UN charter's aims and values, particularly the inadmissibility of involvement impairing the domestic affairs of member states. Third, regarding the Development of the Russian Far East, India will provide a line of credit worth \$1 billion for developing the RFE. The discovery of hydrocarbon deposits along the coast of RFE is another subject of particular interest to India in this region. Fourth, the Maritime Route, a full-fledged marine link connecting Chennai and Vladivostok, has been proposed. Vladivostok is the largest port of Russia on its Pacific coast and is situated on the Russian-Chinese border. With Russian aid, India is developing nuclear power plants in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu's Tirunveli district. It is believed that the establishment of a maritime route will aid the project. It would also boost India's footprint in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea, a contentious body of water (Ministry of External Affairs, 2019).

Fifth is Collaboration in space. Russia will aid in the training and capacity building of Indian astronauts for the Gaganyaan mission. Furthermore, both parties voiced worry about the recommended peaceful usage of space. Sixth, Economic Cooperation, in this sector, the two leaders agreed to increase bilateral trade to USD 30 billion by 2025 from the current \$11 billion. Efforts to promote interbank payment settlements in national currencies will continue. Both parties have agreed to develop new technology and investment collaboration, particularly in sophisticated high-tech fields, and to explore new cooperation routes. In addition, both countries agreed to speed up the process of getting ready to sign the "India-Russia Intergovernmental Agreement on Promotion and Mutual Protection of Investments" and to step up their efforts to remove obstacles to trade. It is anticipated that the free trade agreement

(FTA) that is now being negotiated between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and India would contribute to resolving this problem. Seventh, Military Cooperation; During the conversation, it was brought up that India would not be affected by the sanctions that the United States has put on Russia, which will result in more collaboration between the two countries in vital energy and defense sectors. Both countries are committed to successfully carrying out their bilateral military and technical cooperation program through the year 2020, and they are working toward extending it for an additional ten years (Ministry of External Affairs, 2019).

Further, regarding the Cooperation in International Issues, Russia reiterated its support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council during the meeting (UNSC). Both denounced acts of terrorism in any of their guises and appealed for the whole community to come together in the fight against this epidemic. Both parties restated their commitment to furthering global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The Russian government favored India to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). As a result, India is in a position to make a substantial contribution to the Arctic Council. Both nations reiterated their commitment to constructing an egalitarian and indivisible security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region and their support for inclusive peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, which is led and owned by the Afghan people. It is also crucial to remember that after the EEF 2019, the then-Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Minister of Steel, Shri. Dharmendra Pradhan travelled to India in January 2020 with a group of well-known Indian businesspeople to fulfil EEF 2019 commitments (Ministry of External Affairs, 2019).

India's involvement in the new Vostok Oil, which will obtain Arctic oil through Russia, has been confirmed. In addition, the Russian Far East is connected to the Taymur Peninsula by the NSR. Also inked was a term deal for purchases of crude oil from Rosneft. Understanding and resolving the logistical challenges encountered by Indian enterprises investing in and importing coal from there seems to be a necessary step. It would encourage the Russian and Indian governments to collaborate on expanding port infrastructure to accommodate bigger vessels (Staalesen, 2021).

Again, notwithstanding COVID-19, the Russian Far East government has provided a portal for prospective clients to acquire essential commodities from India. In light of the current Covid-19 epidemic, the Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, addressed the plenary session of the 6th EEF on September 3, 2021, in Vladivostok, Russia. At the 2021 EEF conference in

Russia, an Indian delegation headed by the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, and comprised of top Indian oil and gas corporations was present (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

In 2021, the main theme of the Eastern Economic Forum was ‘Opportunities for the Far East in a transforming world, and the program was divided into four thematic pillars: First, The New Economy: What Changes and What Remains the Same; Second, The Far East: New Challenges and Opportunities; Third, Our Shared Responsibility in a Changing World; and Fourth, Youth EEF. The sixth edition of the EEF stressed the significance of the state-business relationship. Here, the Indian prime minister emphasized the significance of India-Russia ties and possible areas of collaboration within the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership framework. He praised the Russian President’s ambition to develop the RFE region and reaffirmed India’s resolve, as part of its ‘Act East Policy,’ to be a trusted partner in this respect. Therefore, the Indian prime minister highlighted the inherent complementarities between India and Russia in developing the Russian Far East. The Covid incident demonstrated how such interactions would seem in the new normal (Singh, 2021).

In addition, the gathering emphasized how the world’s governments were intent on addressing domestic issues and how to manage current political tensions. It ultimately demonstrates that a degree of isolation from the events of the outside world was no longer a choice but a necessity. During the Covid-19 epidemic, the PM again emphasized and underlined the value of the health and pharmaceutical industries as essential areas of collaboration. He also mentioned other possible sectors of economic collaboration, such as diamond, coking coal, steel, and lumber. PM extended an invitation to the governors of the eleven regions of Russia’s Far East to visit India, recalling the visit of Indian state chief ministers to EEF-2019 (*Hindustan Times*, 2021).

Despite the problems posed by the Covid-19 epidemic, the Indian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, led an Indian oil and gas mission to Russia from September 1 to September 5, 2021. During the tour, he attended the sixth EEF in Vladivostok, Russia, and participated in the EEF-sponsored India-Russia business discussion. During his 5-day trip to Russia, he also visited the Sakhalin-1 oilfield. He also met with representatives from the Russian petrochemical giant Sibur and the Novatek Gas industry company (ANI, 2021).

In addition, a virtual conference between the Chief Minister of Gujrat, Vijay Rupani, and the Governor of the Russian region of Sakha Yakutia was conducted alongside the EEF. In addition, the Indian prime minister said that energy is a crucial pillar of bilateral relations. The energy alliance between India and Russia might help stabilize the global market. He also revealed that the Chennai-Vladivostok marine corridor, an energy and commerce bridge, is progressing. Together, this connection project and the International North-South Corridor would physically bring India and Russia closer together. ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL), the overseas arm of ONGC, and the Indian Oil Corporation (IOL) have signed a memorandum of understanding with Gazprom of Russia to cooperate in the hydrocarbon business. An agreement was reached during the sixth European Economic Forum (*The Statesman*, 2021).

In addition, Indian oil and gas businesses see Russia as the most attractive market for foreign direct investment. Today, Indian public sector businesses have invested more than USD \$16 billion in various projects throughout Russia. These projects include oil and gas assets such as Sakhalin-1, Vankor, and Taas-Yuryakh and investments in the Far East and East Siberia. To minimize its reliance on the Middle East, India plans to double the amount of liquefied natural gas (LNG) it imports from Russia. In 2020, IOC and Rosneft agreed to purchase crude oil at a rate of up to 40,000 barrels per day (BPD) or 2 million tones. Consequently, these immediate implications of India's involvement in the EEF suggest a new dimension of ties between India and Russia, and maybe much more (*Financial Express*, 2021).

Significance of Eastern Economic Forum for India

The Russian acceptance of India into the EEF and the range of agreements between the two countries signaled fresh vitality, direction, and speed. During the 2019 plenary session of the EEF, Russian President Putin stated that the growth and development of the RFE would be a priority for the Russian government in the 21st century. In 2012, 'Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East' was established for this purpose and a presidential envoy for the region was appointed.

At the fifth EEF plenary meeting, which took place in Vladivostok, Russia, in 2019, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was invited as the keynote speaker. This conference was a worldwide event intended to promote economic growth in the RFE. In a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), Delhi and Moscow committed to large-scale economic engagement and outlined a plan for India's participation in the RFE. This was counter to the pattern of

limiting the connection to past acquisitions of military weapons and nuclear facilities or creating their respective positions in global groupings like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) (Kumar, 2019).

Further, the co-opting of India into the EEF by Russian President Vladimir Putin was significant in light of Russia's assessment that the RFE was gaining little benefit from the East Asian economic growth space due to the skewed priorities of the Big Three (the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan). The significance of the Big Three for the RFE was recognized early on by specialists. Furthermore, this happened due to the sanctions the US and the EU placed on the Russian economy. Then, in 2014, the RFE contributed to Moscow's turn to the east and development (Minakir, 2018). Modi's participation at the EEF and signing of several agreements in 'connectivity, oil and gas, deep-sea exploration, space, and energy' suggested that India's presence in the Russian Far East may be a potential corrective to its normal Moscow-centrism. The belief that the Indian government's authority was acknowledged in global economic agreements.

In 2019, after his electoral victory in May, Indian Prime Minister Modi urged 'the country to Look East. The Russian offer was an opportunity to further the government's plans to acquire overseas assets crucial to India's economic growth. The acquisition was carried out partly via a joint venture established by Public Sector Undertakings (PSCs) in the extractive industries and partly by ONGC Videsh or ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL). Since their 2018 meeting, the two sides have engaged in strategic economic dialogue,' which formed the basis of the gamble (Vasudevan, 2020).

Recent events include the Prime Minister of India making a virtual address during the plenary session of the 6th EEF on September 3, 2021, at 'Far Eastern Federal University' in Vladivostok, Russia. The Indian Prime Minister welcomed Russia's ambition to develop the RFE region and reaffirmed India's resolve to be a trusted partner in this respect as part of its 'Act East Policy.' Under the 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership,' he further emphasized the significance of increased economic and commercial cooperation between the two sides. In 2010, the two nations declared exclusive and privileged strategic cooperation (Chaudhury, 2021).

Aside from that, the prime minister emphasized the relevance of the health and pharmaceutical industries as significant areas of collaboration that have evolved in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. Refers to further potential sectors of economic collaboration, such as diamond-cooking coal, steel, and lumber. The Indian Prime Minister invited the governors of the eleven regions of Russia's Far East to visit India, recalling the State Chief Ministers' attendance at the EEF-2019. Recall that the Indian Prime Minister was the Chief Guest at the 5th EEF in 2019, marking the first time an Indian Prime Minister has held this position.

Conclusion

Despite high-level visits from Asia-Pacific states, it is evident from the preceding discussion that the Eastern Economic Forum has achieved little progress in developing the RFE. It will take some time for the RFE to be wholly integrated into the more established economies of the Asia-Pacific since the levels of investment and economic development are currently insufficient. There have been some hopeful advances, as shown by the fact that 33 percent of the FDI Russia has received over the last several years has been invested in the region. Putin asserts that since 2005, outmigration has decreased dramatically, and regional industrial development has been three times the national average. In addition to facilitating continued contact with Asia-Pacific states, the EEF has opened up new prospects for partnership.

The interest in the RFE is growing, as seen by the impending inauguration of the 'Northern Sea Route, Japan's deployment of the eight-point plan in 2016, and South Korea's "nine-bridge approach" to Russia following the 'New Northern Policy.' Despite this, regional development and foreign direct investment (FDI) levels have remained low due to the challenges described above, sanctions imposed by the West, and Russia's faltering economy.

In this situation, the Government of India and its enterprises would do well to evaluate their options thoroughly. Indian businesses are currently involved in the coal mining, oil and gas, diamond cutting, and tea packaging sectors. 70% of RFE exports to India are comprised of coal and oil. Future partnership is conceivable in forestry, tourism, healthcare, and pharmaceuticals, and there is an opportunity for non-permanently settled Indian labour to compensate for labour shortages in the RFE. India would also benefit from creating trilateral collaborations with Japanese and South Korean partners in the mining, forestry, and pharmaceutical sectors to enhance its footprint. If this connection develops into a strategic

alliance, it will assist in protecting India's interests and inject the region's geopolitics with the necessary vitality and equilibrium.

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Reimagining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with their Roots in the Anthropocene

Prajakta Sawant and Pooja

Abstract

The Anthropocene marks a profound shift in planetary activities, with human-induced climate change impacting the Earth's ecosystem and resources. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015 as "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" with a 'set of 17 goals and 169 targets'. The goals aimed to address "social, economic, and environmental" challenges in a coherent manner through political action. However, it has been remarked that the baseline of a healthy ecosystem is not adequately represented in the SDGs framework. This study argues that the SDGs are rooted in the Anthropocene epoch. It will re-evaluate the existing SDGs through the lens of planetary boundaries and ecological limits to ensure human development along with environmental conservation. The study will focus on two SDGs- goal 2, which aims for Zero Hunger; and goal 5, which targets Gender Equality. It will assess the compatibility of each goal with Earth's carrying capacity and ecological processes due to climate change. Access to 'safe, sufficient, and nutritious' food is a major challenge among others posed by the environmental changes in the Anthropocene. Human activities are placing unprecedented pressure on the Earth's ecosystems and resources, disrupting the delicate balance of the planet's natural systems. This disruption has widespread consequences not only for the availability of food but also for its accessibility, affordability, and acceptability. This case study will focus on SDG 2 which aims to "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" and will enquire whether the goal adequately represents the environmental aspect of achieving food sustainability. The second case study on SDG 5 will study how climate change is making gender-based violence worse than its pre-existing form and poses a challenge to achieving the goal of 'gender equality'. Adverse impacts of climate change, including extreme weather changes, resource scarcity, and displacement, disproportionately affect women due to existing gender inequality in access to resources, decision-making power, and economic opportunities. In these circumstances, women become victims of 'sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)'. The current framework of SDG 5 does not adequately factor in climate change as a cause of the perpetuation of gender inequality. Therefore, this case study will re-examine gender issues in relation to climate change.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Anthropocene, Sustainability, Ecosystem, Environment, Climate Change, Agriculture, Gender

Introduction

The human transformation of the natural systems is so unprecedented that the period we live in today is referred to as the “Anthropocene epoch” (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011). The Anthropocene marks a rapid decline in the Earth’s ecosystems and resources, largely driven by human-induced climate change (Seddon et al., 2016). The Anthropocene represents a significant rupture within the Earth system, presenting humankind with profound epistemological and ontological challenges (Crutzen, 2002). Urgent action is imperative for adaption to climate change, given the escalating environmental damage and limitations on viable development options to cater to human needs along with the preservation of the planet. In 2015, the “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” were introduced as “*Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”, comprising 17 goals, 169 targets, and 247 indicators adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations, 2015) (Table 1). These goals were conceived as an extension of the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs) which operated from 2000 to 2015. The SDGs represent the convergence of ‘social, economic, and environmental’ objectives through political actions to tackle the consequences of the Anthropocene (Griggs et al., 2013).

Historically, the concept of sustainable development emerged over environmental concerns. However, there is a notable oversight in adequately representing the essential components of a healthy ecosystem within the SDGs framework. The SDGs prioritize social and economic development over environmental conservation— in numbering, rhetoric, and practice. For instance, the theme line of the SDGs “*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDGs issues are – Social, Economic, and Environmental, and the pillars of SDGs – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership*” where environment or planet’s ecosystem features as secondary (Craig & Ruhl, 2019).

Norström et al. (2014) contend that the SDGs must be grounded in essential insights drawn from interdisciplinary studies that integrate economics, public policy and governance, ecology, society, and technological systems to rethink the SDGs in three ways. One, the human and ecological systems are deeply interlinked and therefore, must be looked at as interdependent socio-ecological systems. Two, SDGs have certain trade-offs among their goals which need to be recognized and their practical feasibility needs to be studied. Three, the SDGs must be informed by the limitations of the processes by which social change occurs at different levels—from individual to global.

It is crucial to acknowledge on a global scale that the well-being of ecosystems is fundamental for societal progress and development. While it is understandable that the SDGs aim to address intra-generational i.e. meeting the requirements of all from the present generation as well as inter-generational equity i.e. safeguarding the requirements of the future generations (Ala-Uddin, 2019), it is crucial to note that the impact of the Anthropocene will be felt globally. All societies and economies are “embedded parts of the biosphere,” and therefore, there is no region that can escape the impact of environmental degradation (Folke et al., 2021). Therefore, this study maintains that the environmental dynamic must be a priority in any effort to secure sustainability.

Table 1. Sustainable Development Goals

(Source: “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, United Nations General Assembly, 2015)

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- SDG 1: No poverty
 - SDG 2: Zero hunger
 - SDG 3: Good health and well-being
 - SDG 4: Quality education
 - SDG 5: Gender equality
 - SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation
 - SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy
 - SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
 - SDG 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure
 - SDG 10: Reduced inequality
 - SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities
 - SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
 - SDG 13: Climate action
 - SDG 14: Life below water
 - SDG 15: Life on land
 - SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions
 - SDG 17: Partnerships to achieve the goals
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This paper argues that there is a need to reimagine the SDGs by identifying their roots in the Anthropocene. It will specifically focus on two SDGs - Goal 2, which aims for Zero Hunger, and Goal 5, which targets Gender Equality. The study asserts that the SDGs do not adequately holistically address the concept of sustainability. The three pillars of sustainability—‘environmental, social, and economic’ are inextricably interlinked, and this is not fully recognised in the SDGs. The fact that human activities have profound environmental consequences and can undermine developmental development goals as well, is not adequately reflected in the SDGs. The well-being of humans is closely tied to environmental health, and a robust ecosystem can play a direct role in enhancing human well-being (Wood & DeClerck, 2015). There is a need for this recognition in the way the SDGs are framed and discussed.

Reimagining the SDGs necessitates a departure from the current linear, numbered framework. The SDGs consist of targets, each specifying, measurable, and time-bound outcomes that play a critical role in attaining a goal, alongside indicators that measure progress based on available data. However, the present framing tends to sideline the environmental dimension, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach with the ecosystem as the foundational pillar of the SDGs. Observably, within the SDGs, the environmental dimension is overshadowed. Goals 1-13 primarily emphasise social and economic objectives, while only goals 14-15 focus explicitly on environmental aspirations. This asymmetry underscores the underrepresentation of ecosystem health within the SDGs. Emphasising human development without adequately recognising and integrating the environmental dimension would undermine the pursuit of sustainable development. For instance, while goals 8 and 9 strive for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and industrialisation, respectively, they fail to fully acknowledge the inevitable environmental repercussions that arise from transitioning agrarian economies to manufacturing-based ones.

It is imperative to recognise that the environment is the boundary of and not the co-equal to social and economic development. As the Anthropocene impacts biodiversity, ecosystems, and resources, development will become secondary to survival in the coming years. Environmental health is prime for human security; therefore, prioritising ecological goals is the first step for the SDGs to become achievable. The Anthropocene raises existential questions over the entire SDGs project and calls for its re-imagination of the goals and redefining the priorities.

Reid et al. (2017) have presented a reconceptualised framework of the SDGs, likening it to a “tree that places healthy ecosystems serve as the roots to support the five branches— Clean

Energy, Water Security, Food Security, Lives and Livelihoods, Governing for Sustainability” as classified by Griggs et al. (2013). The assertion is that the SDGs inadvertently perpetuate “growth fetishism” by endorsing an inherently anthropocentric and neoliberal approach to sustainability (Adelman, 2017). Samir Amin contended that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were a form of discourse designed to legitimise the policies and practices implemented by dominant capitalists and their supporters. This critique is equally applicable to the SDGs (Amin, 2006). Lim et al. (2018) utilised a systems approach to pinpoint gaps and interconnections within SDG goals and targets, identifying leverage points for effective interventions.

Mary Menton et al. (2020) highlight a crucial aspect regarding the SDGs, asserting that environmental justice is presently not fully integrated into the language and structure of the SDGs. They emphasise the importance of incorporating established environmental justice frameworks—specifically, those addressing “distribution, procedure, recognition, and capabilities” more extensively. Moreover, they advocate for an intersectional and decolonial approach to environmental justice, recognising the interdependence and essential value of both humans and non-human entities within this framework. This perspective underscores the need for an inclusive approach to pursue sustainable development.

In terms of gender equality, ecological feminism critically examines the SDGs within the context of the Anthropocene (Barthold et al., 2022; Gaard, 2017; Stevens et al., 2017). Within ecological feminist scholarship, the Anthropocene is seen as a Western-centric concept that heavily emphasises capitalism, industrialisation, and technology, often at the expense of prioritising the well-being of the Earth system and all human beings. From this perspective, it is argued that for sustainable development, the SDGs should focus on ecological concerns before addressing other developmental goals.

The 2030 Agenda emphasises the necessity for transformation. However, achieving a "win-win" scenario is challenging when the very systems that perpetuate poverty, hunger, inequalities, and unsustainable development remain intact. It is contended that these win-win situations are incompatible with a truly sustainable paradigm, considering the oxymoron inherent in the notion of 'sustainable growth' (Bartlett, 1994).

While the concept of sustainability inherently encompasses economic, social, and environmental aspects, the 2030 Agenda focuses on the economic dimension (Ala-Uddin,

2019). A considerable proportion of the SDGs, including those addressing poverty, hunger, and energy, tend to frame the issues primarily through economic lenses. Moreover, the prescribed solutions for these SDGs are often articulated in economic terms, underscoring an economic-centric approach within the 2030 Agenda. The agenda also focuses on universality and ignores the power differentials and asymmetries among countries of the Global North and Global South (Ala-Uddin, 2019).

Therefore, a more pertinent strategy for advancing human development through the SDGs involves focusing on reinforcing precise targets related to ecosystem services within goals concerning the reduction of poverty, food security, health for all, and access to clean water. These goals heavily rely on ecosystems for sustainable accomplishment. The existing dichotomy between environmental concerns and developmental pursuits is evident within the SDGs, highlighting the essentiality of their integration for successful attainment, particularly in the Anthropocene era. The ecosystem approach alone is not sufficient to fully realise the needs of the increasing population. However, it cannot be substituted and must act as the starting point to address sustainability.

The paper is structured into five main segments. Firstly, an introduction is presented, offering a study overview and a review of pertinent literature. The second section outlines the research methodologies employed. The third part entails a case study pertaining to Goal 2, aiming to achieve “Zero Hunger”. The subsequent section concentrates on Goal 5, spotlighting “Gender Equality” as a case study. Lastly, the concluding section synthesises the insights gained from the study and suggests a way forward.

Methods

The study uses critical discourse analysis as a method to understand the SDGs and unpack the underlying politics, ideologies, and power dynamics. Critical scholars contend that hegemonic values and priorities in societies are reinforced through communication. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a crucial analytical approach to understanding the policy priorities inherent in the SDGs. According to Fairclough (1995), CDA has three interwoven tenets: discourse, culture, and social structure. This method allows for a deep examination of the language, rhetoric, and discourse used in the context of SDGs, shedding light on the broader societal, political, and power structures at play (Fairclough, 1995).

As Shapiro highlights, to regard the world of international relations textually ‘is to inquire into the style of its scripting, to reveal the way it has been mediated by historically specific scripts governing the interpretations through which it has emerged’; a focus on texts draws attention to the space in global politics ‘in which the boundaries for constituting meaning and value are constructed (Shapiro, 1989). Discourses hold considerable significance as they play a pivotal role in shaping collective belief systems. These beliefs, in turn, serve as the basis for identities and interests, which in turn can shape norms, and guide decision-making processes. Moreover, institutions, the formal rules and informal norms that shape human behaviour, provide the broader foundations for collective social change (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

Thus, CDA reveals how prevalent social narratives define social phenomena for specific frameworks that uphold established power structures and solutions (Carant, 2017). CDA aims to comprehend alternative narratives, given how the existing dominant narratives do not represent the problem in their entirety. The alternative narratives seek to reshape the institutional structures and frameworks perpetuated by dominant narratives. The SDGs are driven by certain capitalist bases and originate from the interests of certain groups that push forth the neoliberal agenda for development and productivity. These ideas may not represent the idea of sustainability in a holistic manner. Therefore, unpacking the prevailing discourses is an important starting point.

In this study, the case study method has been employed. Goal 2 with the aim of “Zero Hunger” and Goal 5 to seek “Gender Equality” within the SDGs have been selected as case studies to facilitate the re-imagining of the SDGs framework in the Anthropocene. The objective is to illustrate, through the analysis of these case studies, that SDGs in their current framework do not adequately address the detrimental effects of extreme weather changes on food security and gender equality. Thus, the inductive method of research will be used to derive insights and conclusions from the detailed examination of these cases. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how climate change affects the chosen SDGs and highlights the need for an enhanced framework that accounts for these impacts in the age of the Anthropocene.

United Nations as the Norm-maker for the SDGs

The United Nations (UN) serves as a global platform for discussions and a process led by it to attain the SDGs is aimed at involving all the relevant stakeholders such as member nations, civil society organisations, business corporations, and epistemic communities in the interconnected challenges that we face today. The UN provides an international framework to put the SDGs into practice. This international framework has largely divided into three key stages – implementing the goals; monitoring, review, and evaluation; and improving global finance flow for sustainable development (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018). Under the UN, there are three initiatives to pursue the SDGs— “the Open Working Group on SDGs (a 30-member group of the UN General Assembly formed in January 2013 to develop a report on SDGs), the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 agenda, and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)” (Norström et al., 2014).

The institutional framework within the UN involves the “United Nations Development Program” (UNDP), United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), and High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)- each primarily focused on the review and monitoring aspect through regular progress reports. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs (IAEG-SDGs), established under the UN Statistics Division, is formed to streamline and coordinate efforts to monitor and report progress on the SDGs. It comprises representatives from national statistical offices and international organisations. The agency was tasked to develop and implement the global indicator framework for the goals and targets of all SDGs (United Nations Statistics Division 2015).

Along the lines of how international norm dynamics facilitate political change, the SDGs exemplify the significant task undertaken by the UN in norm-making. The creation of SDGs as viewed from the lenses of the norm life cycle demonstrates how norms emerge, the process of their institutionalisation through norm cascading, and later, how they are internalised as they become widely accepted at the global level (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). From ideation to institutionalisation, the UN has supported the SDGs as a norm in shaping global institutional mechanisms as well as national-level developmental frameworks. The UN acts as a norm entrepreneur in its promotion of the SDGs as it encourages critical stakeholders to embrace this norm.

Although the UN has set up the institutional mechanism for the effective implementation of SDGs, still the agenda requires a level of collaboration between the UN system and state actors. Lack of database, multi-stakeholder partnership, and other factors hinder comprehensive monitoring and reporting. Additionally, some indicators lack robust methodologies or require data that is difficult or costly to collect (OECD, 2022). Lack of standardization especially concerning the carrying capacity of ecology is a frequent criticism against the SDGs. This limitation underscores the need to assess the SDGs with greater attention to environmental thresholds.

Examining SDG 2: Zero Hunger

Access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food is a critical challenge posed by the environmental impact witnessed in the Anthropocene. Human activities are placing unprecedented pressure on the Earth's ecosystems and resources, disrupting the delicate balance of the planet's natural systems and the agri-food systems. Therefore, SDG 2 of 'Agenda 2030' aims to "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". It links society, the economy, and the environment in an intrinsic way and, therefore, is the key to the entire SDG agenda (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2016).

The Link between Agri-food Systems and the Anthropocene

To understand the Anthropocene, we need to closely look at how the food and agriculture systems are transforming the earth. The spread of agriculture began around 4000-7000 years ago, leading to long-term development (Fuller et al., 2011; Smith & Zeder, 2013). However, the Industrial Revolution, beginning around the 17th century, transformed the agri-food systems by increasing the loss of biodiversity and the impact of extreme weather events in 1800 (Foley et al., 2013). Thus, the impact of human actions has reached the planetary scale, leading to questions on sustainability (Zimmerer et al., 2019). Scholars have maintained that research does not address the role of agrobiodiversity in the new Anthropocene epoch (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011) and how much the Earth system is dominated by human activity (Ruddiman et al., 2015). Similarly, agrobiodiversity has not been prioritised in the research related to the Anthropocene and how transformative human changes at the local, national, and global scales affect the social, political, and ecological arenas (Brondizio et al., 2016).

The deterioration of agri-food systems caused by human activities has far-reaching consequences not only for food security and the survival of humankind but also for the health

of the planet. The global agri-food sector is the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, the largest cause of loss of biodiversity, destruction of the ecosystem, and cause of pollution and overconsumption of freshwater. Thus, the agri-food systems hold a firm grip over the stability of the planet and the future of humanity (Rockström et al., 2020). Human transformations of the agri-food systems not only contribute to the alarming environmental trends but also have the potential to confront the challenges presented by the Anthropocene (Reisman & Fairbairn, 2021).

In this context, there is a need to align SDG 2 with the four pillars of food security: availability of food, accessibility of food, food utilisation, and stability of food systems (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2008). Extreme weather events reduce agricultural productivity, affecting food availability as obtaining enough food becomes a challenge. Disrupted supply chains lead to price fluctuations and reveal the inequalities in global food distribution, impacting the accessibility and affordability of vulnerable communities. Climate disruptions also threaten food acceptability in terms of traditional diets, practices, plant genetic varieties, and how the nutrients are absorbed in the body. The triple burden of malnutrition, which includes undernourishment, micronutrient deficiency, and overnutrition or obesity among diverse groups across the world, is also a growing challenge (Gómez et al., 2013).

Therefore, achieving food sustainability in line with SDG 2 requires a thorough re-evaluation of its targets. It is to be noted that all these structural issues are inherently linked to sustainability not only with regard to social equity and economic access but also in terms of the health of the environment. The sustainability of agri-food systems is rooted in ecosystem stability. Without a transformation of agri-food systems into sustainable ones, the world will not meet the targets set in the United Nations SDGs (Rockström et al., 2020). This case study aims to analyse whether SDG 2 on which aims to eliminate hunger and achieve food security operates within the planetary boundaries (O'Neill et al., 2018; Rockström et al., 2009).

SDG2 was conceptualised within the theme of 'food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, desertification, land degradation, and drought' during Session 3 of the UN Open Working Group in 2013. During discussions, there were notable deliberations regarding the incorporation of biodiversity as a specific target within Goal 2. Representatives from civil society stressed the importance of emphasising biodiversity, particularly in the context of agriculture, emphasising that "Designing the SDGs without including biodiversity would be

like building a table with a missing leg.” However, these concerns were not adequately addressed within the final formulation of SDG 2 (UN Open Working Group, 2014).

Reviewing the Targets and Indicators of SDG 2

SDG 2 comprises eight targets and 15 indicators, of which the first five targets (2.1–2.5) are related to food security and hunger. The last three (2a-2c) are market-related measures to boost investment in the agriculture sector and mitigate the effects of market restrictions, distortions, and volatility on food systems and, therefore, are not considered in the analysis. Table 2 summarises a review of targets 2.1-2.5 and 2a-2c, highlighting whether each of their indicators addresses any dimension related to environmental sustainability.

Table 2. Mapping of Environmental dimension in the specific targets and indicators of SDG 2 (Adapted from “*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”, United Nations General Assembly, 2015.)

Targets	Indicators	Environmental Dimension
2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular, the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food all year round	2.1.1: Prevalence of undernourishment	Absent
	2.1.2: Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)	Absent
2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons	2.2.1: Prevalence of stunting (height for age <-2 standard deviations from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age	Absent
	2.2.2: Prevalence of malnutrition (weight for height >+2 or <-2 standard deviation from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)	Absent

	2.2.3: Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years, by pregnancy status (percentage)	Absent
2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists, and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources, and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment	2.3.1: Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size	Absent
	2.3.2: Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status	Absent
2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding, and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality	2.4.1: Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture	Present
2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants, and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional, and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed	2.5.1: Number of (a) plant and (b) animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in either medium- or long-term conservation facilities	Present
	2.5.2: Proportion of local breeds classified as being at risk of extinction	Present

It is observed that the environmental dimension is present only in Target 2.4 and 2.5 of SDG 2. These targets are given less importance in the numerical order. The text of these targets also raises concerns regarding their approach to sustainability. Target 2.4 is to “ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase

productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding, and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.” The primary emphasis is on boosting productivity and increasing output within agricultural systems that are already experiencing significant pressure. This shows an approach that is both instrumental and utilitarian towards the planet and the ecosystem. It implies that conservation efforts are primarily pursued to enhance productivity. Environmental well-being is not regarded as an intrinsic goal but rather as a means to fulfill human needs.

Additionally, indicator 2.4.1 of target 2.4, which measures the “proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture,” is problematic due to its vague terminology. The usage of terms such as "productive" and "sustainable" together lacks conceptual clarity, raising questions about what constitutes sustainable practices and how they will be quantified. For example, as an illustration, this metric concerns “the proportion of agricultural land implementing sustainable practices.” Although the percentage is a measurable unit, reaching a consensus on the definition of sustainability, its criteria for achievement, and its interpretation across various scales can pose challenges.

Target 2.5 endeavours to "preserve the genetic variety present in seeds, cultivated plants, farmed and domesticated animals, and their associated wild species." However, the language used is unclear regarding how this genetic diversity will be achieved. Indicator 2.5.1 addresses the preservation of plant and genetic resources, while 2.5.2 focuses on safeguarding local breeds from the threat of extinction. Despite the significance of these UN-proposed indicators in genetic conservation within agriculture, data for monitoring 2.5.1 is notably scarce. Furthermore, 2.5.2 may present an inaccurate representation of a country's efforts to protect local genetic pools due to considerable variations in the proportion of documented breeds in each country. Additionally, the Green Revolution negatively impacted the ecosystem by promoting monoculture practices, leading to a substantial decline in biodiversity. Wheat, rice, and maize alone contribute to more than half of the energy consumed by humans (Gil et al., 2019). This has also resulted in nutrition deficiencies. Therefore, internal contradiction is reflected in the targets of Goal 5.

The extensive application of chemicals and pesticides in agriculture to boost productivity has transformed the environment. The exposure to these chemicals has spread through the air, water, atmosphere, and water reservoirs, reaching even remote Arctic regions, causing

detrimental effects on landscapes. These pesticides possess the potential to induce pesticide or antimicrobial resistance, altering the gene pool. Ironically, the same multinational corporations that market pesticides also advocate for the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) engineered to resist these pesticides. This interconnection between the chemical and seed industries underscores the close relationship between corporations and their influence on agri-food systems (Hayes & Hansen, 2017). A significant majority of the seeds utilised in agriculture are supplied by six major chemical companies (Howard, 2009). It is interesting to note that the largest agricultural seeds, biotech, and pesticide in 2017 were combinations of multinational giants like Bayer and Monsanto, ChemChina and Syngenta, DuPont, and Dow (now Corteva), and BASF (Birner et al., 2021).

The above analysis reveals the anthropocentric nature of the SDGs, where human welfare takes precedence over environmental conservation. It reflects a poor understanding of how the environment is not a coequal factor in the equation of SDGs, but it is the boundary that cannot be breached. Moreover, the inherent structural issues within the global system reflect the hollowness of the SDGs, and questions are raised over the gap between policy and practice.

Reimagining SDG 2: Environmental Lens for Zero Hunger

The links between Anthropocene and food security establish that profound actions are required in how we produce and consume food to stay within the safe planetary boundaries of the Earth. Recognising the intricate link between food security and environmental health, a transformative approach to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) must prioritise the environmental dimension. It must accommodate the idea that the focus is not merely on addressing hunger, but it is about nourishing people sustainably and safeguarding the ecosystems that sustain us.

A fundamental shift must be acknowledging and respecting planetary boundaries in policy priorities. Mere emphasis on doubling productivity and increasing farmers' incomes (Target 2.3) overlooks the long-term consequences of unsustainable practices. The emphasis should be on empowering producers to make well-informed decisions about inputs, free from undue pressure imposed by competitive market forces. This empowerment can be achieved through education, accessible information, and support mechanisms that prioritise sustainability over short-term gains. Promoting sustainable agriculture and regenerative farming is crucial, but it must extend beyond policy rhetoric to actionable, on-the-ground support for farmers. Furthermore, championing local and indigenous food systems rooted in traditional knowledge

systems is pivotal. These systems often harmonise with natural ecosystems, promoting biodiversity, local and seasonal produce, and reducing the carbon footprint. Encouraging these systems not only ensures diverse, nutritious diets but also contributes to building resilient, community-based food networks.

In summary, reimagining SDG 2 necessitates a paradigm shift, placing the environment at the forefront of food security efforts. It calls for an integrated approach that promotes sustainable agricultural practices, respects planetary boundaries, empowers producers, and celebrates local wisdom. This vision envisions a future where nutritious, sufficient food is produced and distributed sustainably, ensuring the well-being of both the planet and humanity.

Examining SDG 5: Gender Equality

Women are the foremost pillar among others for a sustainable society, development, economy, or ecology. Considering this, in the framework of sustainable development goals, gender equality has been enshrined. Goal 5 of the 2030 agenda aims to 'Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls,' focusing on reducing gender inequalities such as discrimination and violence against women and enhancing the effective participation of women in leadership, political decision-making, ensuring rights such as sexual and reproductive health, land ownership, and access to natural resources, etc. (United Nations, 2015). In the continuation of the re-imagining of SDGs with their roots in the Anthropocene, this case study seeks to analyse that the impact of climate change on gender inequality has not been incorporated as a challenge to achieve the goal of gender equality.

Gender-Inequality in the Anthropocene

Feminist critique of the Anthropocene states that it is centred on masculine nature that focuses on destruction, and overconsumption without care for planetary boundaries and other species, and it ignores the ethics of others (Graham, 2011). The Anthropocene focuses on materialism, scientific progress, and capitalism, and it has a gendered, racial nature that leads to environmental destruction (Chiro, 2017). The term Anthropocene, or 'Age of Men,' describes human-induced environmental degradation as involving men only (Walton, 2020; Neimanis et al., 2015). The Anthropocene has generated ecological crises such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and changes in the Earth's ecosystem, affecting women and their environmental relations.

In the Anthropocene epoch, it is evident that pre-existing gender inequality has intensified (Walton, 2020). The unmistakable imprint of human activities drives the escalating climate change characterized by extreme weather phenomena, which in turn trigger natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and storms (Desai & Mandal, 2022). This climate change is not 'gender-neutral but has gender-differentiated causes and effects' (Neimanis et al., 2018). It affects human beings, but women are more affected due to their gender. Adverse effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events, resource scarcity, and displacement, disproportionately impact women due to existing gender imbalance in decision-making power, and economic opportunities. It affects women's rights and impacts their 'well-being and assets' (Goh, 2012, Whittenbury, 2012). They become victims of gender-based violence, experience impacts on health, loss of economic opportunities, ecological vulnerability, and so on (Alston, 2013).

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a precondition for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (Mishra, 2023). It leads to equal opportunities for all, equal access to resources, and the involvement and participation of all human beings in decision-making, the market, and so on. Existing gender inequalities are exacerbated due to problems originating from climate change in the Anthropocene. The current framework of SDG Goal 5 does not adequately address the environmental concern of climate change as a factor in the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Reviewing the Targets and Indicators of SDG 5

SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality, comprises 9 targets and 14 indicators. The first three targets and indicators (5.1-5.3) are linked to the social equality of women, aiming "to eliminate discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girls." The rest of the targets and indicators (5.4-5.9) tend to achieve the social, economic, and political rights of women, and enable them their technological advancement. Table 3 presents the SDG 5 targets and indicators, highlighting whether each of their indicators addresses any dimension related to the environment.

Table 3. Mapping of Environmental dimension in the specific targets and indicators of SDG 5. (Adapted from "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", United Nations General Assembly, 2015.)

Target	Indicators	Environmental Dimension
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce, and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex	Absent
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age	Absent
	5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	Absent
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	Absent
	5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age	Absent
5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age, and location	Absent
5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life	5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments	Absent

	5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	Absent
5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences	5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use, and reproductive health care	Absent
	5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information, and education	Absent
5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws	5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	Present
	5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	Present
5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women	5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex	Absent
5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels	5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment	Absent

Table 3 presents a comprehensive overview of Goal 5 of the SDGs, which focuses on gender equality. It outlines the targets and indicators of the goal and sheds light on whether the environment is considered within the same. There are some concerning issues with these targets. First, it shows that the environmental aspect is absent in most targets and indicators of the gender equality goal. Only target 5.a and its indicators 5.a.1 or 5.a.2 are linked with the environment, specifically concerning the access of women to natural resources and land ownership rights. Second, the relationship between gender equality and the environment is least prioritized in numerical order. Third, the relationship between environment and gender equality is only rhetorically present. Women's access to natural resources has not been consistently addressed during the evaluation of the implementation of these targets (United Nations, 2022, 2023). According to Sustainable Development Goals reports, achieving land ownership rights has also progressed slowly. There is a disparity between men and women in terms of land ownership rights in most countries, with the share of men with ownership over land being twice that of women (United Nations, 2023).

(M)anthropocentric Nature of SDG 5 Negotiations

The formation process of the Sustainable Development Goals was Anthropocentric in nature. During the discussion sessions, women were not well-represented in the “Open Working Group” (OWG) that prepared the draft for the SDGs known as 'The Future We Want.' Mr. Csaba (Hungary) and Mr. Macharia (Kenya) chaired this Open Working Group, both were male representatives (UNGA, 2014). In discussion session 8 on “Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment”, only two women represented the global perspective- Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, and Ms. Nicole Ameline, Chairperson of the “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women” (Session 8, Open Working Group: UNGA, 2014a). During the formation process, to address gender parity, the focus was solely on gender mainstreaming in the political decision-making and economy, also ensuring women’s presence in leadership positions (UNGA, 2012). The ultimate goal of including women in leadership and the political sphere was to advance a capitalistic and liberal agenda. In the specific session on gender equality, the focus was on the masculine nature of war, conflict, and partial socio-political equality, overlooking the root causes of gendered inequality, such as patriarchal restrictions on women and cultural impediments to their growth and development (UNGA, 2014b). Women share a different relationship with the Earth and

the environment, which was neglected during the formation process of SDG 5, both in rhetoric and in practice.

Gendered Nature of Climate Change

The impacts of climate change on women and girls are a grave concern, as scholarship has revealed. Climate change produces several impacts that can either prompt or exacerbate gender-based violence (Vithanage, 2021). When ecological crises such as natural disasters, soil biodiversity loss, and rising sea levels occur due to climate change, migration and displacement take place on a large scale. In such situations, women become a more vulnerable group in terms of accessing resources, basic needs, job opportunities, and dependency on their livelihood, among other factors. It exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities related to discrimination, violence, equal opportunities, and more. Women often become victims of violence such as sexual assault, rape, and harassment during their lives in camps and while searching for basic needs such as food, water, and sanitation (Desai & Mandal, 2022). Women from developing countries and indigenous communities are subjected to more violence during natural disasters (Prior & Heinamaki, 2017; Whyte, 2014). Women face sexual and physical violence not only in public spaces but also within their families. It has been noticed that there is a spiraling growth in domestic violence, particularly intimate partner violence, during and after natural disasters and other climate change crises in the form of 'slow violence' (Wonders 2018).

Climate change also has a severe impact on women's health, including waterborne diseases, malnutrition, brain syndromes, and reproductive health issues (Dimitrov, 2019). Women suffer from higher rates of nutritional deficiencies due to food insecurity, and inadequate nutrition increases the likelihood of morbidity and mortality while decreasing women's life expectancy (Cecillia Sorensen et al., 2018). The negative impact of climate change on women's health in the form of malnutrition is much more relevant in the "Global South" because of their traditional role as caregivers of the home, which means they often prioritize providing food to other family members (Goh, 2012). Women are also disproportionately affected in terms of ownership rights and access to resources by climate change risks. Women were more reliant on agricultural activities and natural resources for their livelihoods. Climate change risks reduce their self-reliance, and women are forced to depend on male members for their means of support. Women lose their land ownership rights, which are already limited, in the circumstances of displacement and migration (Babacan, 2021).

The aforementioned analysis puts forth the idea that climate change has a gendered nature; it affects women differently than other human species. Without considering the severe impacts of climate change on women, it is difficult to achieve gender equality.

Reimagining SDG5: A Symbiotic Relationship between Environment and Women

The current framework of SDG 5 is focused on a Eurocentric view of gender equality and does not incorporate the aspect of the environment in a substantive manner. Women have a different connection with nature for their survival, self-reliance, and economic independence. Women perceive the environment not only from the perspective of production and consumption but also as something to care for and preserve for future generations. Ecological feminist Vandana Shiva has stated that 'We are earth citizens. The earth has rights, and we have a duty to care for the earth, all her beings, and our fellow humans' (Walton 2020: 6).

A transformative action on SDG 5 with a focus on incorporating the different relationships between women and nature to achieve gender equality is needed. In short, re-imagining SDG 5 needs to place the environment at the forefront of achieving gender equality. A healthy ecosystem is a baseline requirement for every living and non-living species on Earth. There is a necessity to adopt an integrated approach where the ethics of women and their relationship with nature are considered, which will lead to achieving social and economic equality.

Conclusion

This study aimed to demonstrate that the SDGs adopted in 2015 for sustainable development are rooted in the Anthropocene. It was presented that the environment is overlooked in SDGs concerning ordering, rhetoric, and practice within the realm of socio-economic development. Out of the 17 goals, only two primarily focus on the environment, which are 'life below water' and 'life on land.' In other goals that address sustainable aspects, the paper underscored the importance of the Earth's ecosystem and environment while prioritising socio-economic development. Environmental risks generated by human activities in the Anthropocene, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the impact on natural resources, will determine human survival over socio-economic development. Therefore, it is imperative to place the Earth's ecosystem at the centre of sustainable development. This paper raised questions about the roots of SDGs in the Anthropocene and highlighted the neglect of the environmental dimension in

their priorities. Therefore, the study emphasizes re-imagining SDGs with a primary focus on the environment and a secondary focus on the socio-economic dimension.

To illustrate the gap in the environmental aspect of SDGs and to re-imagine them, the paper selected two case studies: goal 2, which aims to achieve Zero Hunger, and goal 5, which targets Gender Equality, to demonstrate how the environment is neglected or given lower priority in the SDGs. The first case study on Goal 2 highlights that the Earth is dominated by human-led development, such as industrial growth, technological advancement, and overproduction and consumption. These human-induced activities have a negative impact on the environment, affecting the food production system and supply chain. While SDG 2 aims to eliminate hunger, its targets primarily focus on productivity and food production within the agricultural system, leading to environmental degradation due to an excessive emphasis on utility and productivity without considering the impacts on the Earth's systems.

The second case study also suggests that SDG 5 inadequately incorporates the environmental dimension in achieving gender equality. This deficiency is reflected in the targets and indicators of the goal, where the environment is given less consideration. Climate change affects women differently, leading to increased gender inequality in terms of violence, discrimination, land ownership rights, and access to natural resources. These case studies illustrate how SDGs inherit the challenges of the Anthropocene, as they are less concerned about the Earth's ecosystem and planetary boundaries. This prompts us to reconsider existing goals with a central focus on the environment.

The way forward entails reimagining an alternative framework for the SDGs that intricately integrates environmental sustainability, acknowledges the interdependence of humans and nature, and restructures development goals to prioritise equitable socio-economic growth within planetary boundaries.

The development of the SDGs and their process does not align with a true paradigm shift as described by Thomas Kuhn's theory in the book "*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*" (Kuhn, 1962) but rather signifies a progressive acknowledgment of human-environment relations and the necessity to integrate social, economic, and environmental dimensions. However, due to the complexity and urgency of sustainability challenges, a transformative change in mindset and problem-solving approach, akin to Kuhn's revolutionary science, is needed—indicating the necessity for a genuine 'paradigm shift' (Seyedsayamdost, 2019).

It has been suggested that this paradigm shift should be toward acknowledging and accommodating planetary boundaries, healthy ecosystems, and environmental preservation in policy priorities. A shift in approach is needed, moving from materialism to environmental preservation, to truly achieve sustainable development. Several other SDGs, including reduction of poverty, good health and well-being, and quality education, depend on a healthy environment for their success. Re-imagining the SDGs emphasizes that the environment should take precedence over social and economic development. Only a healthy ecosystem can lead to holistic development and the well-being of both humans and non-humans.

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Sport and International Politics

A Study of Global Trends in the Geopolitics of Football

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Abstract

Over the years, football has emerged as a focal point for geopolitical contestations and socio-political issues, thereby expanding the concept of the 'political' to include cultural, economic, and social dimensions. Football unites states and people, transcending linguistic, socio-political, cultural, economic, and cross-border differences. This underscores football's role as more than just a game; it is a medium for sharing ideas, common interests, ethics, cultures, and values among diverse populations. From FIFA and UEFA banning Russia's national and club football teams from participating in their competitions, the geopolitical tensions that surfaced during the Qatar FIFA World Cup in 2022, to the key socio-political trends relating to securitization, nationalism and sustainability apparent in the UEFA Euro 2024, football's influence on international relations and global politics is undeniable.

As we trace the evolution of football, the lengthening shadows of colonialism continue to loom over the sport, with Eurocentrism still prevailing within governing bodies like FIFA. Amidst such tendencies, the geopolitics of football with regard to the role of Latin American and African nation-states becomes exceptionally pertinent, especially after the victory of Argentina in the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022. Moreover, countries like South Africa and Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2010 and 2022 make room for the inclusion of African and Asian states in the ambit of what is arguably the world's biggest sporting event, making the World Cup truly 'universal' and 'global.'

Therefore, this paper will explore the intersection of football, international politics, and the significant trends that encapsulate the geopolitics of football. The paper will also explore facets like football governance by focusing on FIFA's organisational aspect and functioning.

The paper will incorporate qualitative methods drawing on the paradigms of constructivism and postcolonialism, along with critical discourse analysis as its methodological approach. Substantial archival research has been undertaken by analysing the FIFA archives.

Keywords

Football, FIFA, geopolitics, colonialism, racism, LGBTQ+

Introduction

The Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 was unlike any other as it brought back the prestigious World Cup to Latin America after 20 years since Brazil had won in 2002 and to Argentina after 36 long years since Mexico FIFA World Cup 1986. The nail-biting World Cup final victory for Argentina over France has not only solidified Lionel Messi's legacy but has also instilled a ray of hope, optimism, and zest for a new dawn in the South American country, which is currently experiencing record inflation and political turmoil (Vasavda 2022). But how does football have anything to do with political instability and deep economic distress? How is it relevant in this context? Football is not merely a sport or a form of entertainment. It is way beyond that. Therefore, this paper attempts to trace the intersection of football and international politics, focusing on the politics of football in the age of transboundary crises.

The internationally famous Brazilian footballer Socrates, also known for his medical degree and political awareness, founded the Corinthians Democracy Movement in Latin America (Shirts 1989). The Corinthians' Democracy, or *Democracia Corinthiana* in Portuguese, was an ideological movement and a novel approach to running a club (Shirts 1989). It was regarded in Brazil as one of the most significant actions in the fight against dictatorship and the only movement of this kind ever implemented in a football club. It was a challenge to military rule at the time. It was an idealistic but effective political group campaigning against the club's management's autocratic control over its players. It served as a metaphor for how the military ruled the entire country. The squad members took over the leadership of the team Sport Club Corinthians Paulista under the direction of the polished midfield maestro Socrates, with the support of Wladimir and Waldemar Pires, the club president (Shirts 1989). Together with Wladimir, Socrates organised the players to discuss and vote on all issues that affected them with a simple show of hands, from routine decisions like when they would eat lunch to challenging the dreaded *concentração*, a Brazilian custom where players are essentially imprisoned in a hotel for one or two days before a game. One of their most famous choices was having 'Vote on 15th' printed on the back of their jerseys in 1982 to encourage fans to participate in the first multiparty election in Brazil since the 1964 military coup (Shirts 1989).

The Ballon d'Or is an annual football award presented by French news magazine France Football since 1956 (France Football 1956). Between 2010 and 2015, in an agreement with FIFA, the award was temporarily merged with the FIFA World Player of the Year, known as the FIFA Ballon d'Or (FIFA Press Association 2010). In 2022, France Football inaugurated the

Socrates Prize, a novel award in the history of the awards that identifies the best social initiative by a committed champion (France Football 2022). This prestigious award was given to Sadio Mane for philanthropic work in his native Senegal (France Football 2022). In recent years, Mane has built a public hospital and funded schools and families in his home village of Bambali. The former Liverpool forward also donated to the Senegalese National Committee to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic (France Football 2022).

Sport is often believed to be a part of the popular culture that is, or should, preferably remain unencumbered by politics (Bairner et al. 2017). Academics, however, broadly agree that politics is often integral to sport and that sport frequently lies at the core of politics. Sport and politics have shared a symbiotic relationship, from the Nazi Germany of the 1936 Olympic Games to the recently concluded Olympics and Paralympics in 2024. The idea of the 'political' has been widened over the years to cover almost every aspect of human interactions and life around us. The coming together of states and people through sports, surpassing linguistic, socio-political, cultural, economic, and cross-border differences, reinforces the fact that sports have become a means of sharing ideas, common interests, ethics, cultures, and values among the people of different nations, along with establishing dialogues and exchanges between states.

It was in the 19th century that the institutionalisation of sports first happened, leading to the creation of specialised organisations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA. The institutionalization of sports refers to the development of formalized structures, organizations, and rules to regulate and govern sports. This process has evolved over time and has been shaped by a range of factors, including cultural, political, and economic trends. As sports became more formalized and structured, governing bodies emerged to regulate and oversee the various sports. These governing bodies, such as FIFA for football, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) for tennis, and the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) for basketball, developed standardized rules and regulations for their respective sports and established international competitions and championships. Aiding the institutionalization processes was also the phenomenon of the professionalization of sports. As sports became more popular and financially lucrative, performance-based payments started being made, which led to the formation of professional leagues and associations (Sage 2010). As sports organizations grew in size and complexity, they increasingly hired professional administrators and executives to manage their operations, leading to the professionalization of governance.

The institutionalisation of football, too, reflected these developments. The growth and evolution of football from an 'uncodified' to a professional, standardised, association-based sport testify to the remarkable global nature of the game (Sage 2010).

Transboundary crises, such as political conflicts, social upheavals, economic disparities, and environmental challenges, profoundly impact football's geopolitics and global political economy. As the world becomes more interconnected, these crises transcend national boundaries, necessitating a broader perspective in analysing their effects on football. Issues like banning national or club teams from participating in FIFA/UEFA competitions, as witnessed with Russia, or the geopolitical controversies surrounding the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 highlight this very interface between sport and international politics.

FIFA's decisions and actions have the potential to impact not only the sport of football but also broader issues related to development, human rights, and governance. FIFA's governance structure and decision-making processes have been subject to criticism and controversy over the years, particularly concerning issues such as corruption and transparency, for example, the allegations against FIFA President Sepp Blatter (Sugden and Tomlinson 2017), sportswashing, human rights violation in case of the Qatar World Cup 2022, etc. Despite these challenges, FIFA remains an influential and powerful organization, and its role in international politics will likely continue to be a subject of study and debate in the years to come.

The first section of this paper attempts to analyze the intersection of football and politics and explores the dynamics at play by focusing on FIFA – its origins and evolution. The second section encompasses the role of FIFA in the politics of identity, exploring sub-themes such as colonialism, racism, and resistance. It also explores the theme of inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ in football and FIFA's role in the same. The final section deals with the contemporary global trends in the politics of football.

Research Methodology

Through the evolution of FIFA's role in international politics, the study provides a qualitative descriptive and critical discourse analysis of the global system. Through paradigms related to constructivist and postcolonial theories of international relations, the paper aims to explain how the international organisation of FIFA operates in international politics. To understand the role of FIFA as an International Organisation through themes such as bureaucracy, authority and autonomy, and power and pathologies, Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore's

framework for understanding International Organisations in Global Politics using a constructivist approach rooted in sociological institutionalism has been incorporated. Substantial archival research has been undertaken by extensively analysing the FIFA archives.

FIFA's engagement in international politics through its governance system posits that it plays a significant role in an increasingly globalised world, given its relations with both state and non-state actors in international politics. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the interface between football and international politics and the global trends that encapsulate football's geopolitics by examining the role of FIFA as an International Organisation – entailing issues like governance, bureaucracy, power, and pathologies.

This paper also highlights FIFA's colonialist and neo-colonialist roots and thus views football through a postcolonial perspective.

Football, FIFA, and Politics

To understand the role of FIFA, the history of its origins and the process of internationalisation of the same need to be traced. Evidently, seven European football-playing nations established FIFA in 1904. The tale of its expansion from 7 to 211 member associations is testimony to FIFA's tremendous influence on global cultural relations and international sport (Tomlinson 2014). Tomlinson (2014) traces the origins of FIFA and its role as a symbol of early 20th-century globalising forces. These forces were based on cultural, political, and economic initiatives that transcended national boundaries and had some transcontinental implications.

FIFA is an international non-governmental organisation that operates as the overarching body for the management and regulation of world football (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998). The early stages of FIFA's origins created a dynamic between the global and the national that has continued to shape relationships between FIFA and its global constituencies; this inherent contradiction between national interests and international aspirations has bolstered the story of FIFA's growth, as since its inception the organization has served as a platform for several states to articulate national distinctiveness, national belonging, and national identity (Allison and Tomlinson 2017). World football, which commenced as a predominantly Eurocentric endeavour, has evolved into a global passion that can evoke national pride in unprecedentedly spectacular and, more lately, increasingly sophisticated mediated and digitalized ways (Goldblatt 2008).

Sugden and Tomlinson elucidate how in the structure of the regional committee of FIFA, states that were otherwise 'politically invisible' found a 'political platform for focusing and asserting often newly acquired independence and national identities' (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998: 12). In the mid-1970s onwards, these new national and regional governing bodies (confederations) and the South Americans who wanted to diminish the European influence in the organisation, pushed for reform in the FIFA organisational structure. This led to the election of the first non-European President of FIFA in 1974 - João Havelange.

Scholars such as De Waele, Gibril, Glorizova, and Spaaij - provide a systematic analysis of the links between football and politics (Waele et al. 2018). They focus on the political origins of football and discuss how each nation-state adapted a traditional English game to the unique aspects of their local culture. These scholars also attempt to answer how the development of a relationship between England and the Western World changed due to the introduction of football (Waele et al. 2018). These issues are intimately related to how football contributed to the formation of the nation (Hobsbawm 2001) and how local political forces utilized the game's explosive growth in popularity as a unifying force. These scholars address the issue of football's dual function in bolstering political authorities' domestic legitimacy and their external image and reputation on the world stage (Waele et al. 2018). They also argue how football often acts as a catalyst for socio-political tensions and conflicts in society (Waele et al. 2018). This effect is related to the significant symbolic and identity weight given to athletic competition, which creates an ideal environment for developing and reinforcing national identities, with sporting concerns layered on racial conflicts.

The dynamic ways in which football is involved in the construction and contestation of collective identities, community, and globalisation are repeatedly demonstrated by research on football and politics. Foer, an American journalist, argues how football can be considered a metaphor for how people organise, identify, and express themselves in the modern world (Foer 2004). He took up case studies that illustrate and enrich our understanding of the relationship between football and politics. Scholars such as Armstrong, Giulianotti, and Robertson have also explored the intricate but shifting interactions between universalism and particularism in society, politics, and football (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1999; Giulianotti and Robertson 2009). Their work highlights how deeply ingrained global networks, cosmopolitanism, transnational capitalism, and global cultural consumption are in sports and politics (Sandvoss 2003; Giulianotti and Robertson 2007). However, (at)At the same time, however(exclude),

they also reveal a wide range of particularisms of cultural appropriation, adaptation, and socio-political contestation concerning both the genesis and development of football and the current sociocultural, political, economic, and ethical issues it faces in various countries around the world.

Evolutionary phases of FIFA

The founding of FIFA

Football as a sport seemingly originated in England and spread beyond its shores through ports to cities such as Le Havre (home to the first professional French club), Barcelona, Marseilles, Bilbao, Hamburg, and Genoa. The inhabitants of these ports attempted to imitate the English merchants who played football for leisure. By the mid-19th century, the culture of football continued to expand throughout England via railroads, which facilitated tournaments among public institutions like schools. This development eventually penetrated Europe and Latin America (Boniface 1998). Notably, England did not become one of the founding members of FIFA. The founding nations included Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. These countries often sought advice from more seasoned British associations. England had a chance to lead but rebuffed this opportunity with arrogance. Throughout its early years, the British—particularly the English—exhibited apathy and insularity that baffled their continental counterparts. Once the FA felt sufficiently recognized, it formally joined FIFA. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, Belgium and the Netherlands urged the FA to consider forming an international organization to enhance the 'European game' (Tomlinson 2014). England was seen as a natural leader in this initiative. However, Denmark did not play its first international match until 1908 at the London Olympics; Switzerland also debuted that year. Interestingly, three founding members—Sweden, France, and Spain—lacked established football associations when FIFA was founded; Spain was represented by a delegate from FC Madrid (Oliver 1992). In 1905, FIFA invited the FA to join. Subsequently, at the third FIFA Congress in Berne in 1906, England assumed the presidency and welcomed other British associations into membership. The English held office until 1920 and rejoined briefly from 1924 to 1928 before leaving due to disputes regarding amateur payments; they returned in 1946. During these early years of English leadership, contentious eligibility questions frequently arose. Scotland and Ireland were denied membership at the Vienna Congress in 1908. Austria and Germany had intended to apply for membership on behalf of their confederate states only if Scotland and Ireland were admitted. Despite retracting this threat,

Austria managed to expel the Bohemian FA due to Bohemia being an Austrian territory. A splinter organization called 'Union Internationale Amateur de Football Association' was established in 1909 by groups from France, England, and Bohemia (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). At the Milan Congress in 1910, "the admittance against the statutes of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales" showcased FA's leadership within FIFA and its growing influence on international matters (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). Argentina and Chile joined in 1912; the USA followed in 1913; South Africa joined around 1909-1910. C.W. Hirschman from Holland served as FIFA's secretary until 1931 and claimed that FIFA was "the authentic head" of "a universal game," even though control over rules remained with IFAB composed of four British associations (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). In 1911, Germany proposed that FIFA should eventually become the legal authority over football regulations. The English president of FIFA and FA rejected a proposal allowing a member of FIFA to serve on IFAB. However, at the Copenhagen Congress in 1913, it was agreed that two FIFA members would be invited to join IFAB; this arrangement was confirmed the following year (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). Despite fluctuating UK associations' formal membership status within FIFA, foundations were laid for long-term cooperation between FIFA's administration and British association leaders (Lanfranchi et al. 2004).

Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay were provisionally accepted into FIFA during World War I. The British organizations remained steadfast in their refusal to recognize football associations that allowed matches against defeated nations; they resigned from FIFA in 1920 based on moral grounds (Tomlinson 2014). The FA reacted negatively when Ireland's newly independent Football Association was accepted into FIFA but allowed British re-entry into FIFA in 1924. However, this reconciliation proved short-lived (Tomlinson 2014). In February 1928, British associations unanimously resolved to withdraw from FIFA until 1946 during a meeting in Sheffield. Their withdrawal recommendation emphasized that they "should be free to conduct their affairs as their long experience has shown desirable" (Report of the Conference of the Representatives of the Associations of the UK 1928). Wall expressed in correspondence with FIFA secretary C.A.W. Hirschman that decisions made by FIFA/IOC barred UK participation in Olympic Games; he argued that adapting rules regarding amateur/professional distinctions was necessary for "remedying mischief" caused by rule-breakers (Report of the Conference of Representatives of Associations of UK 1928). Consequently, British associations opted out of a FIFA-based Olympic tournament; two years later they missed out on participating in Uruguay's inaugural World Cup.

FIFA's Journey Forward

Despite British withdrawal, FIFA continued expanding its membership base with Cuba and Costa Rica joining in 1927 after prior national associations had begun associating with FA. In recognition of South America's continental confederation established in 1928 FIFA adopted a new emblem featuring interlocked globes representing all continents—replacing the previous year's globe image showing Europe alone (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). This growth necessitated a more robust administrative structure; members suggested appointing a permanent secretary based in Zurich (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). Beyond organizing World Cups held across Uruguay, Italy and France during this decade—FIFA's primary focus shifted towards regulating international player movements rather than amateurism issues which had dominated earlier discussions (Lanfranchi et al. 2004). Rimet opposed proposals advocating for five independent continental confederations from newly admitted South American Executive Committee members; he believed that establishing regional power centres would undermine FIFA's global authority (Tomlinson 2014). The post-Rimet era saw an emergence of confederations which expanded Congress membership over fourfold by time when celebrating its centennial anniversary in 2004; however, Rimet's vision allowed gradual promotion towards internationalism within inter- & post-war expansions at FIFA (Tomlinson 2014). He responded positively towards demands made by Central American & Asian groups advocating for “more equal treatment” under sports universalism” (Dietschy 2013) spending considerable time negotiating & adjusting non-European sporting cultures & political systems. In 1923, Egypt became Africa's first FA member joining while Thailand followed suit becoming Asia's first member association joining in 1925 (Tomlinson 2014). Despite receiving crucial funding during Uruguay's inaugural World Cup held back then only Belgium & France along with Romania & Yugoslavia chose travel across Europe participating therein (Tomlinson 2014).

In 1938, Confederations for Central America and the Caribbean were established, and they lobbied along with the South American confederation for increased representation within FIFA and guaranteed spots in the World Cup finals (Tomlinson 2014). These conflicts between established South American Associations, the upcoming Central American Associations, and the world governing body based in Europe controlled FIFA business in the 1930s. Rimet called for regional cooperation in 1939 while addressing the South American Congress in Buenos Aires: "Mutual understanding is based on knowledge." (Tomlinson 2014). His diplomatic efforts prevented South America from forming a separate organisation, and despite some

aspirations to take the helm of the global organisation, South American CONMEBOL professionals helped FIFA survive the war years and were rewarded by making Spanish one of the official languages of FIFA in 1946 (Tomlinson 2014).

From FIFA's base in Switzerland, which remained neutral during the war, German general secretary Schricker managed the organization's operations. However, no Congress could be convened, and FIFA's Swiss bank accounts were nearly depleted due to a lack of subscriptions and match earnings, halting all operations (Tomlinson 2014). Although the South American confederation supported FIFA, it also sought to elect one of its members to the FIFA Executive Committee as president, claiming that all other members' terms had expired. With the cancellation of the 1942 World Cup, FIFA had no preparations or resources for 1946. Despite these challenges, the weak international federation persevered and was revived through European efforts that raised start-up funding, re-invited the British associations, and solidified the partnership between IFAB and FIFA (Tomlinson 2014). The UK associations engaged in intensive discussions with FIFA regarding their re-entry conditions, inspired by FA secretary Stanley Rous' belief that sport would play a crucial role in the post-war period. Rous proposed 'immediate measures' in 1944 'following the cessation of hostilities in Europe', including a review of the relationship between the four British National Associations and FIFA, considering the advisability of resuming membership and extending representation on the International Football Association Board to allow for more direct representation from all countries (Post War Development – An Interim Report 1944). In April 1946, a conference was held between the British associations and FIFA at the FA headquarters in Lancaster Gate, London. Jules Rimet officially invited the British to rejoin FIFA, which they accepted (Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on June 3rd, 1946). At FIFA's 25th Congress at Luxembourg Town Hall at the end of July 1946, "the proposals by the Four British Associations... were accepted," and their re-election to membership was "unanimously and enthusiastically received" (Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on June 3rd, 1946). During this meeting, FIFA rejected a membership application from the Palestine Sports Association because Palestine FA was already a member. Additionally, Germany and Japan were expelled from membership while Honduras and Syria were confirmed as new members. The Welsh association planned to apply by October; both the FA and Irish FA had rejoined, while the Scottish FA considered further amendments. Arthur Drewry was nominated as a British candidate for FIFA vice president (Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on June 3rd, 1946). Stanley Rous thus achieved four independent national associations within one country—

the UK; a permanent vice-presidential position for British associations on FIFA's executive (matching that of South American confederations where other member associations competed for just two positions); and reaffirmation of IFAB's autonomy so that game rules would be "settled by" and "promulgated by" IFAB regardless of FIFA's involvement (Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on June 3rd, 1946). The entitlement to this vice-presidential position for UK associations was not annulled until the 63rd Congress in 2013 (FIFA Congress 2013). In 1947, a football match took place at Hampden Park in Glasgow between Great Britain and Rest of World. This event solidified agreements between Rimet's FIFA and post-war FA along with other UK associations. The British team won decisively with a scoreline of 6-1 before an audience of 135,000, generating £30,000 in revenue for FIFA. This victory helped re-establish FIFA in a position of hegemonic leadership while providing financial security; its governing body would oversee operations for the next 28 years. By mid-20th century, Rimet had established some stability for FIFA. The succeeding three European presidents built upon this foundation as they navigated significant expansions in FIFA's reach and reputation within a postcolonial context (Tomlinson 2014). Given that FIFA was founded in Europe, there was no immediate need for distinct European organizations or additional continental confederations outside South America; it was believed that an organization based in Europe could adequately represent global interests (Tomlinson 2014). Rimet's vision of a global football family contained elements of paternalism rooted in colonialism. For this family to remain united in the latter half of the century, his successors needed to understand postcolonial dynamics. Continental confederations began forming soon after Rimet stepped down to challenge his vision for global unification: UEFA was established for Europe in 1954; Asian and African confederations followed in 1954 and 1957 respectively. The Central American Confederation emerged in 1961 alongside Oceania's confederation formed in 1966 (Tomlinson 2014). These developments strengthened FIFA's legitimacy while creating an administrative framework from which its hegemony could be questioned.

FIFA in the 1960s and 1970s

The political climate shifted during the 1960s and 1970s as global public opinion became more critical of authoritarian regimes and increasingly sympathetic to human rights issues (Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes 2001). This change led to heightened political tensions within football, resulting in a series of missteps by FIFA leadership. For instance, Sir Stanley Rous, FIFA president during the 1960s, openly supported South Africa's Football Association despite

its alignment with apartheid policies. In 1973, FIFA's general secretary Kaser was convinced by Chile's Pinochet regime that using the National Stadium as a site for torture did not preclude it from hosting a World Cup knockout match. Furthermore, in 1978, FIFA's reputation suffered significantly when it allowed Argentina to host the World Cup despite being under military dictatorship led by General Videla at that time (Pierre Lanfranchi et al. 2004).

FIFA Since the 1980s

Starting in the 1980s, FIFA began appointing politically astute and socially aware individuals to key positions within the organization. This shift led to a more serious approach toward anti-racism provisions in FIFA's official statutes. The sporting boycott movements of that era created challenges for organizations like the International Olympic Committee but spared FIFA (Christiane Eisenberg 2006). Subsequently, FIFA managed to address organizational issues effectively. In 1999, a National Associations Committee was established with inspectors and inspection trips modelled after the United Nations. This committee carefully reviews membership applications and intervenes when political interference threatens football or democratic standards (Christiane Eisenberg 2006).

FIFA's origins can be seen as a symbol of early-20th-century globalization influenced by cultural, political, and economic initiatives transcending national boundaries (Tomlinson 2014). The first men's World Cup in Uruguay marked a significant milestone in football history amid various challenges related to professionalism and international participation. As FIFA navigated political controversies throughout subsequent decades, it gradually evolved into an organization that took social issues more seriously while expanding its global reach.

FIFA, Colonialism, and Racism

FIFA's origins are deeply tied to colonialism. The organisation was established during the height of European colonial expansion, coinciding with the advent of geopolitical studies and the continuation of territorial control into the 20th century (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019: 39-42). The "pro-colonial foundations of FIFA," dominated by European powers that controlled global football, marginalised rival nations from other regions (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019:

39). This dominance is evident in decisions such as hosting World Cup events in Europe and the fact that all World Cup winners historically belong to former colonial powers or “aggressively racialized states” (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019: 39).

A critical geopolitical framework helps analyse FIFA’s role in global football. Unlike classical geopolitics, which emphasizes state actors, critical geopolitics reveals the influence of non-state entities like FIFA (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019). The organisation’s creation coincided with the colonialist “scramble for Africa” and its enduring effects. For example, FIFA's statutes allowed non-sovereign states to join, reflecting shifting values in the “anti-imperial” age while leveraging “opportunistic nationalism” to increase its global influence and profit (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019: 41).

Football matches between former colonisers and colonies often transcend sport. A notable example is the 2001 friendly match between Algeria and France, the first since Algeria’s independence in 1962. Algerians born in France used the match to express their contempt for French society and protest ongoing discrimination. In the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the Algerian team was regarded as “the other French team” by commentators, underscoring the complex interplay between football and postcolonial identity (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019).

FIFA has evolved from explicitly pro-colonial roots to a neocolonial entity, reflecting the delegitimization of colonialism and the rise of anti-imperial sentiment. However, its legacy remains entrenched in colonialist practices. Most World Cup winners and hosts are former colonial powers or “aggressively racialized states” (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019: 41). Furthermore, FIFA’s leadership has predominantly consisted of ‘white, upper-class, elderly, straight, European men,’ reinforcing its Eurocentric, masculinist worldview (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019).

Even non-coloniser states like Uruguay and Argentina, which have won World Cups, are not free from scrutiny. Uruguay’s eradication of its Indigenous populations and Argentina’s status as a regional power position them as ‘football colonizers’ exporting players and coaches globally. Using Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, Uruguay’s role in exporting talent to European “core” nations raises questions about whether this dynamic constitutes neocolonialism (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019: 53).

Africa provides a critical lens to examine FIFA’s colonial and postcolonial dynamics. The spread of modern football to Africa during colonial rule mirrored the broader power

inequalities between First and Third World nations (Darby 2002: 173-178). Darby highlights football's role in African independence movements and post-war demands for fair representation in FIFA. However, European powers resisted these calls to maintain their dominance in world football (Darby 2002). Despite this, Africa's growing assertiveness culminated in South Africa hosting the 2010 World Cup—a symbolic moment of postcolonial representation.

FIFA's handling of racism has faced widespread criticism. While campaigns like *Red Card to Racism* and *Kick Polio Out of Africa* signal progress, structural inequalities persist (Sugden 2010). For instance, African states struggle with underrepresentation within FIFA's leadership, and resource disparities limit their global competitiveness (Parrish and Nauright 2014; Alegi 2018).

FIFA has made strides in addressing gender equity, notably following the 2019 self-immolation of Sahar Khodayari, an Iranian woman barred from entering a stadium. Global outrage led FIFA to pressure Iran into allowing women spectators, marking a watershed moment for gender rights in football. On October 10, 2019, over 3,500 women attended a World Cup Qualifier in Iran, breaking decades-long barriers. Such moments underscore football's potential as a vehicle for social change (Power et al. 2020).

Football has also been associated with militarism, propaganda, and tribalism, serving as a symbol of masculinity and resistance. FIFA's power as a non-state sovereign entity enables it to bypass state authority through measures like emergency World Cup laws and member suspensions (Bar-Ona and Escobedo 2019). These dynamics reveal a complex interplay of colonialism, racism, and resistance within the sport, making FIFA a focal point for understanding global power structures and identity politics.

Football, FIFA and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

FIFA's relationship with the LGBTQ+ community has evolved significantly over time, reflecting broader societal changes and the organisation's growing commitment to inclusivity and human rights. In its early years, FIFA, much like many global sports organisations, maintained a conservative stance regarding LGBTQ+ issues. Homosexuality was largely stigmatised and marginalised in many societies, and this was mirrored in the world of football. The lack of openly LGBTQ+ players and the absence of explicit anti-discrimination policies within FIFA's statutes reflected the greater societal reluctance to address these issues. The

relational dynamics between FIFA and national associations often exacerbated this reluctance. National federations, reflecting their own societal norms and pressures, were generally unwilling to challenge the status quo. The few instances of discrimination or homophobia were typically handled at a local level, with little intervention or guidance from FIFA. This period was marked by an implicit acceptance of exclusionary practices, rooted in the existing cultural and political contexts of the time. Since the inception of FIFA, the rainbow flag was hoisted at the FIFA Headquarters in Zurich for the very first time in 2021 (FIFA 2022).

The turn of the 21st century marked a significant shift in the relational dynamics surrounding LGBTQ+ issues within FIFA. Increased activism and advocacy from LGBTQ+ groups, coupled with growing societal acceptance, began to influence FIFA's approach. The relational interactions between these advocacy groups and FIFA's leadership played a crucial role in initiating change. In 2013, FIFA explicitly included sexual orientation in its anti-discrimination statutes. This decision was not made in isolation but was the result of sustained pressure and dialogue between FIFA, LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, and human rights groups. The relational approach highlights how these interactions were pivotal in pushing FIFA to adopt a more inclusive stance.

On 16 May 2022, a landmark moment arrived in understanding LGBTQ+ people's experiences of sport. Blackpool Football Club's (Blackpool) Jake Daniels became the first male professional player to 'come out' as gay while still involved in his sporting career in the UK since Justin Fashanu on 22 October 1990. Almost 32 years had passed in that period, and in that time 'progress' had perhaps been made, but on an uneven terrain where moments of regress were also evident. Legislative changes, for instance, achieved through the passing of parliamentary Equalities Acts and the removal of 1988's 'Section 28' (Dixon 2021; Waites 2000, 2003; Wise 2000) had been beset by conflicting accounts about the scale and intent of LGBTQ+ prejudice in that period. Notably, in the context of Daniels' 'coming out', Fashanu had suffered vilification from his manager, fellow players, football fans, and even members of his own family (Magrath 2017) and he took his own life on 2 May 1998 after being accused of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old male, fearing prejudices around his sexuality meant he would not be tried without discrimination. A small number of professional male football players later would 'come out' as gay after plying their trade in the UK in the intervening years, but these were few and far between. Robbie Rogers had only felt comfortable reporting his sexuality shortly after moving to play football in the United States (in 2013) and Thomas Hitzlsperger did likewise less than one year after retiring completely from his professional athletic career

(in 2014). It is unlikely they were lone cases of men identifying their sexualities to be alternative to heterosexual in those three decades but – at least publicly – silence and invisibility prevailed. Just nine days after making his first team debut, 17-year-old Jake Daniels emphatically broke that silence:

"I've hated lying my whole life and feeling the need to change to fit in. I want to be a role model myself by doing this. There are people out there in the same space as me that may not feel comfortable revealing their sexuality. I just want to tell them that you don't have to change who you are, or how you should be, just to fit in. You being you, and being happy, is what matters most." (Jake Daniels, www.blackpoolfc.co.uk, 16 May 2022)

The platforms through which Fashanu and Daniels publicly disclosed their sexualities also differed. The former had only publicly come out under duress, after learning that details about his sexuality were about to be revealed in *The Sun* national newspaper. Subsequently, Fashanu tried to assert some control over the story by agreeing to an exclusive – and paid – interview with the news outlet, whose headline read: '£1 m Football Star: I AM GAY'. Reflecting on the 'exclusive', Marshall (1991: 4) said: 'The Sun dragged out the tale with titillating stories of sexual encounters with unnamed MPs, football players and pop stars, which, he claims, were largely untrue'. The latter came out with interviews to the Blackpool website which was simply entitled 'A Message from Jake Daniels' and contained only words attributed to him, the piece signed off simply by 'Jake'. This was immediately followed up by an interview with Sky Sports, that – as noted across the book – has a recent history of supporting LGBTQ+ people in football, where the player said that 'it is time to tell people about the real me'. Daniels telling his story appeared to be on his terms, counter to Fashanu 22 years earlier.

PiF functions as a social movement organization (SMO), officially formed on November 16, 2014, during the first national LGBTQ+ fans' group conference, #PrideinFootball (Millward's 2023). This conference, hosted by the *Fans for Diversity* campaign in collaboration with *KiO*, *FSF*, *GFSN*, and *FvH*, brought together LGBTQ+ fans and fledgling supporters' groups from various football clubs. *PiF*, symbolizing an SMO, has an elected board and operates as a network of LGBTQ+ fan groups aligned with professional football clubs in the UK, as noted by Stephanie Fuller, former chair of Proud & Palace (Millward's 2023). *PiF* constitutes its own social world, comprising not only LGBTQ+ football fans but also journalists, media professionals, and personnel from organizations such as *Kick It Out (KiO)* and the *Football Supporters Federation (FSF)*. This world extends beyond geographical boundaries, connecting

with LGBTQ+ networks across Europe, such as *Fußball fans gegen Homophobie (FfgH)* and *Queer Football Fanclubs (QFF)*. The PiF social world serves as a space for friendship and camaraderie (Shepard 2011, 2015), and an architecture of communication, including face-to-face and social media contacts, facilitates mobilization for action when necessary. Such actions may include lobbying football-governing bodies, clubs, and sponsors or supporting individuals who have suffered prejudice. The social world of PiF can thus mobilize as a movement in response to moral shocks (Jasper 1997, 1998, 2018).

The #PrideinFootball conference in 2014 marked the genesis of PiF's organization, fitting into a broader network supporting LGBTQ+ football fans and challenging discrimination (Millward's 2023). Jon Holmes highlights the aims of these networks, including providing social gatherings, ensuring a safe and welcoming atmosphere, lobbying club officials, and mobilizing supporters against discrimination (Holmes 2017).

Contemporary global trends in the politics of football

The Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 was one of a kind since it was the first time an Arab country got to host the World Cup. Moreover, it was the second time for an Asian state to be the host since the FIFA World Cup 2002, hosted by South Korea and Japan. The Qatar World Cup had its share of criticism with issues such as violation of human rights, mainly migrant workers' rights, women's rights, LGBTQIAP+ rights, alcohol consumption inside the stadiums, environmental impact, climate change, and corruption. Qataris and spectators from the larger Arab and Muslim worlds had a significant reaction to these issues since they believed it was intended to undermine the success of the first World Cup hosted by an Arab or Muslim nation. While the Western media saw the prohibition of alcohol and the refusal to display the slogan 'OneLove' as violations of people's First Amendment rights, many Arab and Muslim audiences saw these actions as a steadfast adherence to their religious and cultural values (Abdulrahman Al Marri 2023). Despite not accommodating all human rights requirements, Qatar implemented significant legal reforms after being selected as the tournament's host (Abdulrahman Al Marri 2023). Moreover, the World Cup's hosting helped raise local awareness of the state's determination to enact laws to promote human rights and prevent violations.

This also hints at the involvement of oil money, petrodollars, and the Arab world in football. In a bid to diversify their oil money, the Gulf states are housed in sovereign wealth funds. Thus,

they started investing in football. It began in 1977 when UAE recruited the former England and Leeds United manager, Don Revie, to manage their football team. This has reshaped the political economy of football significantly. Hence, there has been a transformation in the sport – from a game of the people to a game of the elites.

FIFA World Cups have been sites for protest – be it the '*Say No to Racism*' campaign, the Moroccan national team's display of solidarity with the cause of Palestine after they defeated Spain in the Qatar World Cup 2022, or the 'OneLove' Armbands, and how the German National team protested after they were not allowed to wear the armbands during the matches. These are only to list a few. There are many more such instances.

FIFA's delayed response to the Palestinian Football Association's (PFA) request to suspend Israel from international football has sparked critical comparisons with its swift action in banning Russia. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, FIFA, along with UEFA, quickly imposed sanctions, banning Russian national teams and clubs from international competitions. This decisive action was lauded as a strong stance against geopolitical aggression. However, in the case of Israel, FIFA has repeatedly postponed its decision, despite a formal request from the PFA in May 2024. The PFA's accusations against Israel include complicity in violations of international law, discrimination against Arab players, and the inclusion of clubs from Palestinian territories in the Israeli league (Reuters 2024). Despite the urgency of the matter—given the backdrop of ongoing conflict in Gaza and the destruction of Palestinian football infrastructure—FIFA has delayed its legal assessment and shifted the decision timeline from July to August and now to October 2024.

The contrast in FIFA's handling of these two situations raises pertinent questions about the consistency of its policies. While the organisation acted swiftly in the case of Russia, the prolonged decision-making process concerning Israel highlights potential double standards in FIFA's approach to politically sensitive conflicts. This discrepancy suggests the complexity of global sports governance, where geopolitical alliances, legal considerations, and broader political dynamics may influence outcomes.

The recently concluded UEFA Euro Cup 2024 also brought key sociopolitical issues such as securitization of sporting mega-events, nationalism, and sustainability to the forefront (Ludvigsen, J. A. L., et al. 2024).

Over the past few years, the neologism 'sportswashing' started appearing more frequently in English-language media. Simon Chadwick, in his work, defined sportswashing as a means by which a country can deflect audiences' attention away from less favourable perceptions of a country via a programme of investment in sport' (Chadwick 2022: 12). Jules Boykoff has also mentioned the phrase and offered a similar definition: 'using... sports megaevents to try to launder your reputation on the world stage' (Francis 2022).

Sportswashing is a strategic practice employed by nations or entities to enhance their reputation and divert attention from negative actions or human rights concerns through high-profile sports events, teams, or investments. It involves using the association with sports to project a positive image and gain legitimacy on the global stage, often overshadowing or whitewashing underlying issues or controversies. Sportswashing aims to leverage the popularity, media coverage, and emotional connection of sports to create a favourable perception and enhance the reputation of those involved, ultimately seeking to influence public opinion and shape narratives in their favour. Examples such as the 1936 Summer Olympics, Berlin, and the 1976 FIFA World Cup, Argentina can be cited in this regard.

Other global trends in football politics are soft power and nation branding, transnational ownership and investment, migration, sectarianism, class politics, and football's representation in popular culture. Some interesting case studies can be looked at for further readings. They are – the role of ideology and emotions in the Argentinian cult of Maradona, the successes and contestations in the multiracial Brazilian football, the politics of identity in Italy, the role of football for the Palestinians in Jordan, the dynamics of power politics in Cameroon, football and violence in war-torn Africa, football and social rehabilitation in Sierra Leone, Football and witchcraft in Tanzania, etc. (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1997).

Conclusion

In the contemporary world characterised by global connectivity and interdependence, the politics of football has emerged as a significant domain that transcends national boundaries. Sporting events, particularly football, have become sites where geopolitical contestations, socio-political issues, and the global political economy converge. The influence of football on international relations has become undeniable, especially in the age of transboundary crises that pose challenges that extend beyond the confines of individual nations.

Football, as a global sport, has long been intertwined with historical legacies, particularly colonialism. The prevailing Euro-centrism within football governing bodies such as FIFA reflects the sport's historical roots. The paper traces the evolution of football and its institutionalization, shedding light on the historical and geopolitical factors that have shaped the game. As the governing body of football, FIFA has experienced significant growth and has become a near-universal organization, reflecting the international dynamics of the 20th century. However, the influence of FIFA is not limited to the realm of sports but extends to broader political, socioeconomic, and cultural issues. Furthermore, this paper has highlighted the politics of identity within football, including the legacies of colonialism, racism, and resistance. It has also touched upon FIFA's relational dynamics with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

Overall, this paper attempts to contribute to the understanding of the role of sports, particularly football, in the global political landscape. The analysis of FIFA's operations, its impact on international politics, and the various trends in the politics of football provide insights into the dynamic nature of this relationship. Despite challenges such as corruption allegations and controversies, FIFA remains a robust and influential organisation, shaping both the sport of football and global processes.

The intersection of football and international politics is a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon. Further research can probe deeper into specific case studies, explore additional theoretical perspectives, and examine the role of other sporting organisations in international politics.

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