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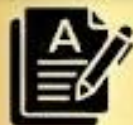
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PHILOSOPHERS AT THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ



INTEREST FREE

SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA

Editor

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PHILOSOPHERS are not doing too well these days. Chomsky was defrocked and walked off the pulpit just before the war. Bombs fell on a Gandhi hospital in Tehran. The other day, the Iranian strongman Ali Larijani met his end—we read of his impressive bouts of Persian wrestling with Immanuel Kant to justify 'eastern' theocracy, like the poet Iqbal a century ago. In between, another sentence was left hanging when Jürgen Habermas departed from the scene.

Many say Habermas had already died months earlier, by philosophical suicide, when he refused to put Gaza on an equal footing with holocausts closer home, as a crisis of morality that put the world in peril. The limits of western philosophy seem as geographical as they are philosophical! The universal rights to life and dignity are not that universal after all, and seem to stop somewhere north of the Mediterranean.

It remains for us to rummage through the debris of ethical models and see what can be retrieved. Even in their failing, or especially in those moments, we can peep

under the hood of their thoughts, see all the inner wiring, and try to reverse-engineer a simpler but more serviceable model of use to humanity.

Habermas is one of those who put philosophy directly to the question of international law. There is irony in the fact that he has passed on when international law has broken down again, like a 1940s' model Ford after decades of rough use. A time when democracy is in crisis globally—both within national boundaries and across them.

He came out of a post-war Europe that had seen what happens when truth collapses under power. His answer was not heroic leadership. Germany had had enough of that by then. Nor was it blind faith in bureaucratic institutions insulated from people. It was something more difficult and demanding, but ultimately simple. Think of it like a telephone exchange.

At its root, his democracy is built around conversations. All his life, Habermas stood guard over the notion that reason, argued out in the open, creates and exerts its own power. What he called the "public sphere" was a space where citizens argue, question, justify. Not shout, not perform a theatrical role, certainly not intimidate—but argue in a way where the better argument has a chance. Reason, he felt, would hold things together when everything else is fraying. It would be the spirit that legitimises governments. If they listen to their people.

Look around, and in today's climate of noise and propaganda that sounds almost naive. Our debates—on television, on social media, among family—tick frequency rather than meaning. Everyone is speaking, few are listen-

ing. Positions are declared, like the Iron Dome, but rarely tested.

Yet, human progress has always come from dissent. India's own lapse into dogma is curious because its history of thought was quite clearly written at the picket lines. The 'Sad-darsanas' often exist in refutation of each other, the early Buddhist councils argued deeply about what the Buddha said and what dhamma meant, Nagarjuna said meaning is nothing by itself, and the Jaina tradition said everything is meaningful!

Jürgen Habermas may have committed philosophical suicide when he refused to put Gaza on an equal footing with the Holocaust. But his idea of a 'public sphere' where citizens can argue with reason is more relevant than ever

The dramatic image of Socrates walking through Athens, needling people with questions, is another version of the same instinct. We wouldn't be where we are if Galileo hadn't directed his questions at the Church. Every society at some point, produces these figures. And almost every society at some point, crucifies them while eventually accepting their answers.

That's why Habermas, even when he feels slightly out of place in a new world order, also feels familiar. He is making a case for something very old. Out of place because his "communicative rationality" suggests that if conditions are right, people can reason their way to understanding. The real issue is that the

conditions are never right these days.

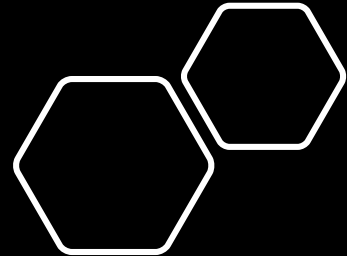
Ambedkar saw that early enough, cutting through the optimism. He understood that argument, by itself, does not level anything. You can have all the debate in the world, but if some voices carry more weight than others before the conversation even begins, the outcome is skewed.

With 21st century mass media, the problem has metastasised. The overwhelming majority of "communicative" actions out there are from media industries that are extensions of power. Western thought control, as Chomsky showed, is only a vastly more ingenious update of the Soviet-era version. The trusty old model runs well too. Tel Aviv has its own Iron Curtain, and it's doing well, thank you, even if its Iron Dome isn't.

But such a stance means you still fear the truth. Perhaps it's with Donald Trump's "Post Truth Social" that Habermas's communicative rationality breaks down utterly?

But Gaza—or the Jin Jiyun Azadi protests—give us ways to test Habermas. He had a conception of world citizens. Humans being invested with the right to life, liberty and dignity everywhere. Yet he feared a "world government", and left more than enough space for states to continue enjoying monopoly over violence within their boundaries. A philosophical Strait of Hormuz, perhaps, but we can see theocratic ships of all religious shades slipping through unmolested.

So he too has ended up too aligned with power, too insufficiently attentive to imbalance. Still, the present algorithmic capture of words makes his core method very relevant. How do we rebuild the "public sphere", this time globally? How do we talk to each other?



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Public Sphere (Öffentlichkeit):** A concept by Jürgen Habermas. It refers to a virtual or social space where private citizens come together to form public opinion through rational-critical debate. It is meant to be an intermediary between civil society and the state.
- **Communicative Rationality:** Habermas's theory that human beings have the capacity for reason that is expressed through communication. The goal of dialogue is mutual understanding and consensus, not strategic victory. It assumes participants are free, equal, and willing to be persuaded by the "unforced force of the better argument."
- **Iron Dome:** A mobile, ground-to-air defense system used by Israel to intercept rockets. The article uses it metaphorically to describe how debates are "shielded"—positions are declared defensively, but never genuinely tested by counterarguments.
- **Iron Curtain:** A term popularized by Winston Churchill to describe the ideological and physical boundary dividing the Soviet bloc and the West during the Cold War. The article uses "Tel Aviv has its own Iron Curtain" to suggest a modern, informational barrier that separates narratives, preventing open communication.
- **Post Truth:** Defined as circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. The article co-opts Donald Trump's "Truth Social" platform to coin "Post Truth Social," highlighting the collapse of shared factual reality.
- **Algorithmic Capture:** The phenomenon where digital platforms (social media, search engines) use algorithms to predict and manipulate user behavior, often trapping users in "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" that reinforce existing biases rather than exposing them to diverse, reasoned debate.
- **Sad-darsanas:** The six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy (Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta). The article notes that these schools often exist in *refutation* of each other, establishing that the Indian intellectual tradition is deeply rooted in debate and dissent.
- **Jin Jiyān Azadi:** A Kurdish phrase meaning "Women, Life, Freedom." It became a global rallying cry during protests in Iran and the broader Kurdish regions, symbolizing the intersection of gender equality, human dignity, and political freedom.
- **Iron Dome (Metaphorical):** The article cleverly uses the actual Israeli Iron Dome to symbolize a "dome" of argumentation—a defensive posture where ideas are protected from scrutiny, analogous to how a military defense system shields a territory from attack.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis:** The article presents a critical eulogy for Jürgen Habermas. It argues that while his core idea—the "public sphere" where reasoned argument legitimizes governance—is more relevant than ever in the age of misinformation, his own philosophy had blind spots regarding power imbalances and state sovereignty.

- **Key Supporting Arguments:**

- **The Failure of the Present System:** Contemporary media, driven by algorithms and corporate power, has metastasized the problem of "thought control." It prioritizes frequency over meaning, creating echo chambers (e.g., "Post Truth Social") rather than genuine debate.
- **The Necessity of Dissent:** Drawing on Indian philosophical traditions (Buddhist councils, Nagarjuna, Jainism) and social movements (Jin Jiyan Azadi), the article asserts that human progress is driven by dissent and argument, not by monolithic consensus.
- **The Ambedkarite Critique:** B.R. Ambedkar's perspective is used to challenge Habermas's optimism. Ambedkar recognized that formal equality in argument (the right to speak) is meaningless without substantive equality (the power to be heard). Debates are skewed before they begin if some participants are socially or economically marginalized.
- **The Sovereignty Paradox:** Habermas advocated for "world citizens" and human rights but feared "world government." This led to a philosophical contradiction where he allowed states to retain a monopoly on violence, failing to adequately address state-sponsored injustices (implied in the Gaza context).



Historical Evolution of the Issue (Idea of Public Discourse)

Ancient Foundations (Pre-18th Century): The article roots the tradition of reasoned debate in ancient India (Sad-darsanas, Buddhist councils). This establishes that the concept of public reasoning is not a Western import but a universal human endeavor.

The Enlightenment Era (18th Century): This is where Habermas locates the "classic" public sphere. It emerged in the salons and coffeehouses of Europe as a new middle class began to debate matters of state independent of the church and monarchy.

Post-World War II (Mid-20th Century): Habermas emerged from post-war Europe, witnessing the collapse of truth under Nazi totalitarianism. His philosophy was a reaction to that trauma, seeking a rational foundation for democracy to prevent a recurrence.

Late 20th Century (Structural Transformation): Habermas himself noted the "structural transformation" of the public sphere, where it was re-feudalized by mass media and corporate interests, turning citizens into passive consumers rather than active participants.

21st Century (Digital and Post-Truth): The issue has evolved into its current crisis. The advent of social media, algorithmic amplification, and the weaponization of misinformation (as seen in global populism) represents a total breakdown of the conditions Habermas envisioned.

The Crisis of the Public Sphere: Navigating Reason, Power, and Technology

THE IDEAL VS. THE REALITY (GS II, Essay)



Habermas's Ideal:
The 'better argument' prevails among equals.

ANCIENT ROOTS OF DISSENT:
India's Sad-Darsanas and Buddhist councils established institutionalized debate millennia ago.



Ambedkar's Structural Critique:
Reasoned debate is a 'top dressing' if social hierarchies prevent equal footing.



THE MODERN CRISIS & THE WAY FORWARD (GS IV, Essay)



MODERN CHALLENGE:
Technology prioritizes outrage over truth, fragmenting shared reality.



EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE & SELECTIVE MORALITY:
Global power imbalance; dominant narratives control discourse, voices from the Global South carry less weight, leading to geographically conditional universal human rights.

INFORMATIONAL IRON DOME

PATH TO RESTORATION:
Democratize global governance, regulate algorithms for transparency, and revive the Socratic method in education to save democracy.



DIGITAL AGE



CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY
Mode: Socratic Method / Buddhist Councils
Challenge: Persecution of the Dissenter



HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF DISCOURSE

ENLIGHTENMENT
Mode: Coffee Houses / Salons
Challenge: Exclusion of Non-Elites

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Kantian Foundations:** The article rests on a Kantian assumption of human autonomy and the public use of reason. The idea that citizens can come together and, through debate, arrive at universalizable principles (the "better argument") is fundamentally Kantian.

- **Pragmatism:** There is a pragmatic assumption that "reason... would hold things together when everything else is fraying." This suggests a belief that dialogue is not just a moral good but a functional necessity for social cohesion.

- **Conflictual Consensus:** The reference to Indian philosophy (Sad-darsanas existing in refutation) introduces a philosophical base of *disagreement as the engine of knowledge*. It implies that the goal isn't always harmony, but rigorous testing of ideas through conflict.

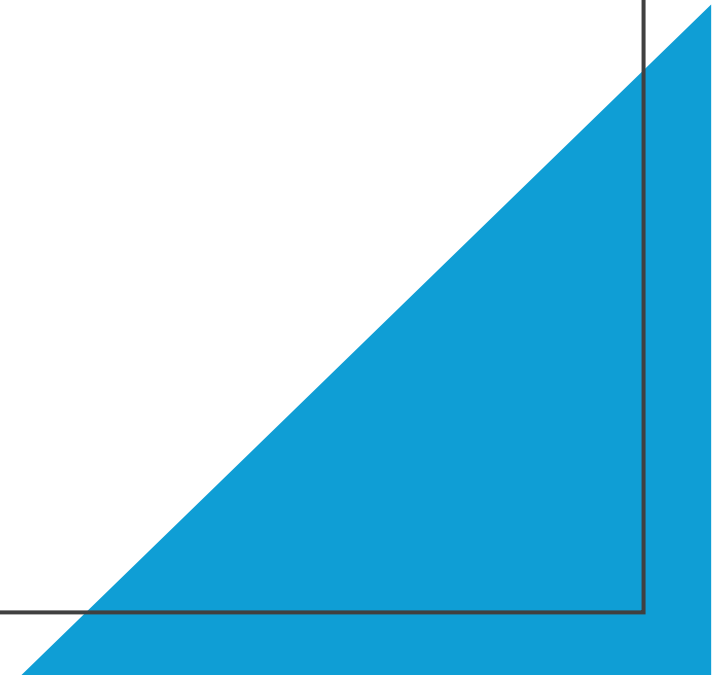
- **Marxist and Critical Theory Undertones:** The critique of media as "extensions of power" (Noam Chomsky) and the Ambedkarite focus on structural inequality challenge Habermas's idealism. This aligns with a critical theory perspective that "false consciousness" or structural oppression prevents the ideal speech situation from ever occurring.

- **Universalist Ethics vs. Communitarian Reality:** The article highlights the tension between Habermas's universalist ethics (world citizens) and his refusal to dismantle state sovereignty (world government), exposing a foundational weakness in cosmopolitan philosophy when confronted with realpolitik.



- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social:** The breakdown of localized dialogue leads to atomized societies. We are increasingly "speaking" but rarely "listening," leading to high social friction and zero-sum cultural conflicts.
- **Political:** "Post-truth" politics allows leaders to bypass reasoned debate entirely, relying instead on theatricality and emotional manipulation to secure power.
- **Legal:** The glaring inconsistencies in how international law is applied (e.g., the International Criminal Court's varying urgency depending on the geography of the conflict) erode global trust in legal frameworks.
- **Ethical:** There is a severe crisis of moral relativism. Universal human rights are treated as conditional, fracturing the moral authority of legacy institutions and thinkers.
- **International:** The Global South continues to challenge the hegemony of Western thought control, demanding representation and a restructuring of global governance (like the UN Security Council).
- **Economic:** The "attention economy" actively disincentivizes rational debate. Outrage is profitable; consensus is not.



- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 11 Political Science (Political Theory):** * *Chapter 2: Freedom*. Links directly to the concept of freedom of speech, expression, and the public sphere.
 - *Chapter 4: Social Justice*. Connects to Ambedkar's realization that true justice requires equal footing, not just equal rights on paper.
- **Class 12 Political Science (Contemporary World Politics):**
 - *Chapter 6: International Organisations*. Explains the failure and necessity of bodies like the UN to act as a global public sphere.
- **Class 11 Sociology (Understanding Society):**
 - *Chapter 4: Introducing Western Sociologists*. Helps understand the foundational ideas of state power, bureaucracy, and public interaction.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1:** *Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism.* The analysis of identity politics and echo chambers links to social fragmentation.
- **GS Paper 2:**
 - *Parliament and State Legislatures:* Functioning, disruptions, and the decline of deliberation.
 - *Media:* Role and challenges.
 - *Civil Society:* Its role in the public sphere.
 - *India and its Neighborhood:* Geopolitical aspects mentioned (Gaza, Israel).
- **GS Paper 3:** *Science and Technology:* Challenges of social media, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and their impact on internal security and society.
- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics):**
 - *Ethical Dilemmas:* The conflict between universal principles (Habermas) and situational ethics (Gaza).
 - *Moral Thinkers:* Can incorporate Habermas, Ambedkar, and Kant.
 - *Public/Civil Service Values:* Probity, integrity, and the responsibility to communicate honestly.

Way Forward

Constitutional and Institutional Reforms:

- Strengthen parliamentary committees to restore them as deliberative bodies where the "better argument" can prevail.
- Mandate algorithmic transparency for social media platforms to prevent "algorithmic capture."

Educational and Social Interventions:

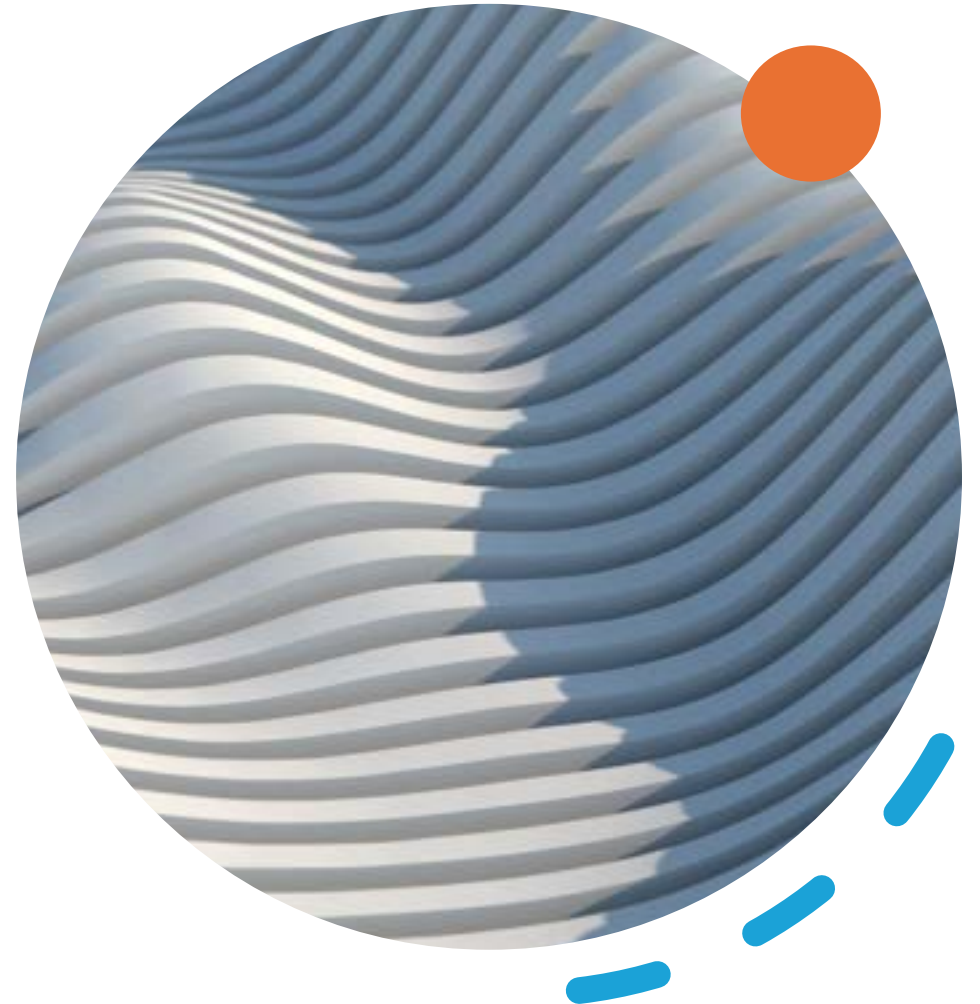
- **Critical Pedagogy:** Integrate media literacy and philosophy of science into school curricula to build a populace resilient to misinformation.
- **Strengthening Gram Sabhas:** Revitalize grassroots democratic institutions as actual sites of deliberative democracy, addressing Ambedkar's critique by ensuring participatory parity (equal ability to participate).

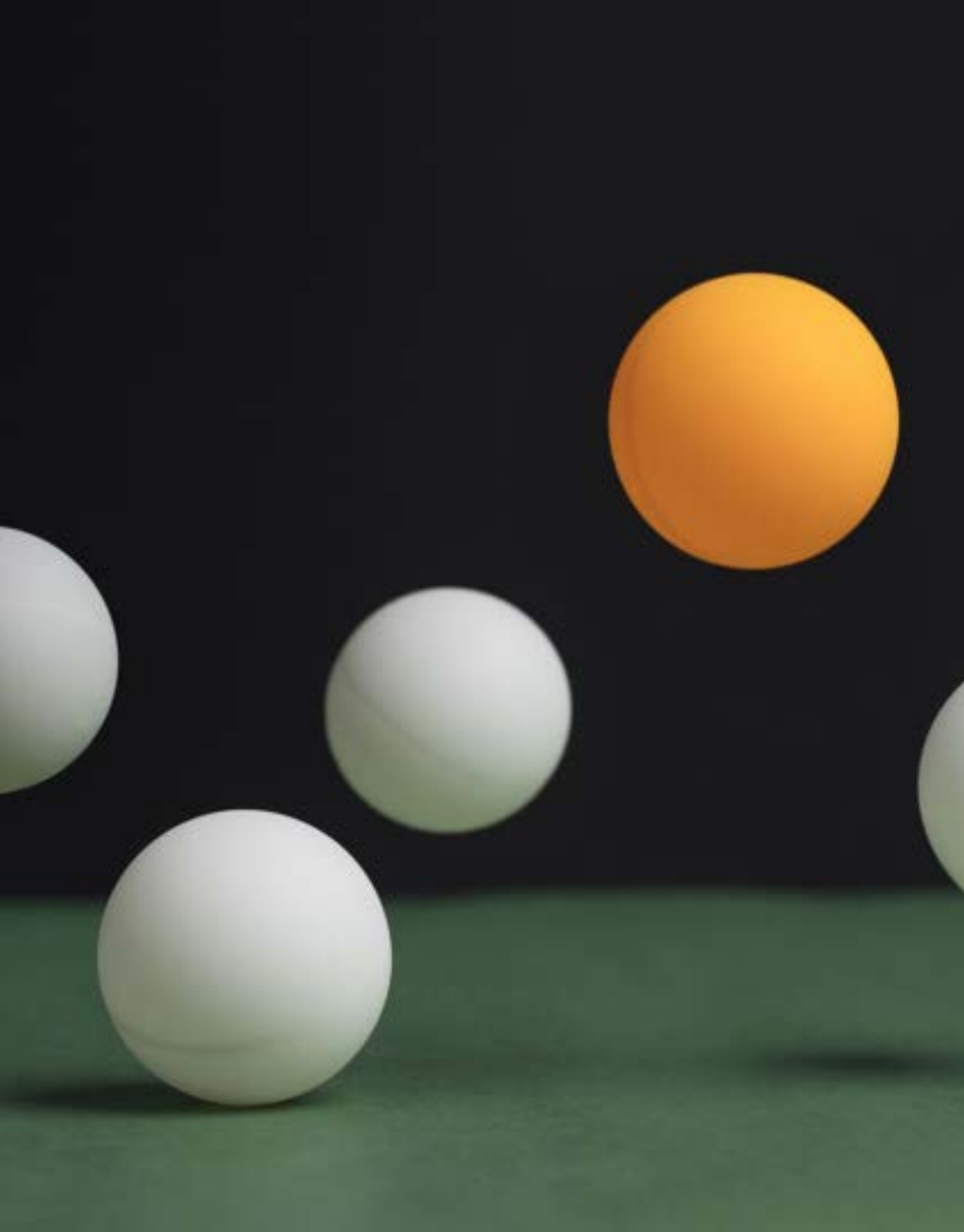
Legal and Regulatory Approach:

- Shift from content-based censorship to conduct-based regulation (e.g., regulating the design features of platforms that amplify harm, rather than just removing specific posts).
- Reconcile data protection laws (like the Digital Personal Data Protection Act) with the need for a free public sphere.

International Cooperation:

- Support the idea of a "global public sphere" through forums like the UN, focusing on global digital compacts to ensure the internet remains a space for global civic deliberation.





- **UPSC CSE Mains:**
 - **2023 (GS-2):** "What are the challenges to the public sphere in India? Discuss the role of social media in this context."
 - **2022 (Essay):** "The function of democracy is not to create consensus but to create a space for dissent."
 - **2021 (GS-4):** "The true essence of democracy is the freedom to disagree." Discuss this in the light of recent trends.
 - **2020 (GS-1):** "The spirit of tolerance and love is not only an interesting feature of Indian society from very early times, but it is also playing an important part at the present." Elaborate.
 - **2019 (GS-2):** "In the context of digital technologies, what is the significance of the 'public sphere' in a democracy?"
 - **2018 (GS-1):** "How does the idea of a public sphere relate to the concept of social justice in India?"
 - **2017 (GS-2):** "The emergence of social media has fundamentally altered the relationship between the state and its citizens." Comment.
 - **APSC Mains (General Studies):** Frequently includes questions on media ethics, freedom of speech, and the impact of social media on society.

Ramabai and Savita Ambedkar: Hidden figures of India's history

While Dr Ambedkar's intellectual and political contributions are rightly central, the lives that sustained the continuity of his work remain less examined.

OPINION

SANTISHREE DHULIPUDI PANDIT



Histories of social change are often written through the lives of those who lead movements, who write, and speak from positions of authority. This is both understandable and limiting as a feature of studying history, because it leaves out the conditions that make such work possible over long periods of time. In the case of the greatest Indian of Independent India, Bhausaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar, while his intellectual and political contributions are rightly central, the lives that sustained the continuity of his work remain less examined. A closer look at Ramabai Bhimaso Ambedkar and Savita Ambedkar offers a more complete understanding of how that history was actually lived and carried forward.

Ramabai's life unfolded under conditions that were structurally defined by deprivation and exclusion. Born in 1898 in a coastal village in Maharashtra, she lost her parents early and moved to Bombay, where survival required constant adjustment. There was no access to formal education,

no institutional support, and little room for mobility. Her marriage to Ambedkar in 1906 placed her within a household that would remain economically fragile for years. What followed was not a transition into stability, but a prolonged engagement with uncertainty. As Ambedkar pursued higher education abroad, Ramabai remained in Bombay, managing a household under severe constraints. Financial resources were limited and often unpredictable. The emotional strain was equally significant. Four of their five children did not survive, a fact that speaks not only to personal tragedy but also to the vulnerability of their circumstances. These were not episodic hardships but continuous pressures that shaped everyday life.

Within this context, Ramabai's role cannot be reduced to a conventional notion of support. She maintained continuity in an environment where interruption were always a possibility. Managing scarce resources, maintaining the household, and absorbing repeated shocks required discipline and long-term orientation. Importantly, she demonstrated a clear understanding of the broader purpose underlying Bhausaheb's Ambedkar's education. When questioned about his absence, she consistently

framed it as necessary, recognising that his intellectual work had implications beyond the immediate household. This orientation towards a future not yet visible reflects a form of judgment grounded in experience rather than formal training. Her contribution lies in this sustained capacity to hold together a fragile structure over time. It is a form of labour that rarely enters formal accounts because it does not produce texts or institutions, yet it is indispensable. Without such continuity, long-term intellectual projects are difficult to sustain. Ramabai's life demonstrates how



Ramabai Ambedkar endurances, organisation, and clarity of purpose can operate as enabling conditions for larger historical outcomes.

Savita Ambedkar's trajectory emerges from a different social context, but it intersects with a similar structural function. Born in 1909 into an educated and reform-oriented family, she had access to higher education at a time when such opportunities for women were limited. Trained as a medical doctor, she entered Bhausaheb's Ambedkar's life in the 1940s, when his work was at an intense, demanding phase. A significant decline in his health also marked this period. The relationship between Bhausaheb Ambedkar's intellectual output and his

physical condition becomes crucial at this stage. Chronic illnesses, including diabetes and hypertension, posed serious constraints on his ability to sustain work at the required level. It is within this context that Savita's role becomes particularly significant. Her intervention was not limited to conventional care. It involved systematic management of his health through a regulated diet, medical supervision, and the imposition of routine. Savita also served as an intellectual companion and sounding board for Dr Ambedkar's late-stage manuscripts. Her academic background allowed her



Savita Ambedkar to assist in the meticulous proofreading and organisation of his research, making her a collaborator in the production of his final works. This form of intervention had direct implications for the continuation of Dr Ambedkar's work.

By stabilising his health to the extent possible, she enabled him to maintain a demanding schedule of writing, thinking, and public engagement. The final phase of his life, including his engagement with Buddhist philosophy and his last major writings, unfolded within this framework. Savita's contribution, therefore, can be understood as extending the temporal conditions under which his intellectual work could be completed. Her presence

during the conversion to Buddhism in 1956 further reflects her participation in a moment of profound social and ideological significance. However, the period following Ambedkar's death reveals the fragility of recognition attached to such roles. She faced suspicion and exclusion from sections of the movement, despite her proximity to his work and the significance of her contribution. An inquiry later cleared her of allegations, but social acceptance did not return immediately. For a considerable period, she remained on the margins of the very history she had helped sustain.

Bringing Ramabai and Savita together allows for a more grounded understanding of women's agency in the context of social transformation. Their lives do not conform to a single model of empowerment. Ramabai operated within conditions of severe deprivation, without access to formal education or institutional resources. Savita functioned within a different framework, bringing professional expertise into a relationship that required both intellectual companionship and medical intervention. Despite these differences, both played roles structurally central to the continuity of Ambedkar's work.

This invites a broader reconsideration of how agency is defined and recognised. Public visibility, authorship, and formal authority are important markers, but they do not exhaust the range of contributions that shape historical outcomes. Functions such as sustaining continuity, managing constraints, and providing long-duration work remain under-ack-

nowledged, even though they are critical. The lives of Ramabai and Savita demonstrate that these forms of labour are neither incidental nor secondary. Recovering such histories requires methodological openness. It involves paying attention to personal narratives, community memory, and forms of knowledge that are not always captured in official archives. Indian Knowledge Systems offer a useful framework in this regard, as they recognise lived experience and relational labour as legitimate sources of understanding. They allow us to see how histories are carried not only through texts and institutions, but also through lives that absorb pressure and sustain purpose over time.

To foreground Ramabai and Savita is not to obscure Bhausaheb's Ambedkar's legacy in reductive terms. It is to understand it more fully. Their lives were not extensions of his. They were distinct, shaped by their own circumstances, decisions, and forms of strength.

At the same time, they were deeply intertwined with a larger historical project whose continuity depended on precisely such forms of labour. A more complete account of social transformation must, therefore, move beyond the visible and the formal. It must also recognise the quiet, persistent work that ensures that ideas do not remain unrealised. In that expanded frame, Ramabai and Savita Ambedkar stand not at the margins of history, but within its core from the margins.

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Hidden Figures:** This term refers to individuals whose contributions to significant historical events or social movements have been overlooked, marginalized, or erased from mainstream narratives. Their work is often informal, relational, or supportive, making it less visible than the public-facing roles of leaders.
- **Structural Deprivation:** This describes systemic and persistent disadvantages embedded in the social, economic, and political fabric of society. It's not just individual poverty but a condition created by caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and lack of institutional access.
- **Continuity Labour:** A crucial concept from the article, this refers to the often-invisible work required to sustain long-term projects, movements, or intellectual endeavors. It involves managing daily constraints, absorbing shocks, and maintaining stability so that visionary work can continue uninterrupted.
- **Agency:** In sociological and historical terms, agency is the capacity of an individual to act independently and make their own free choices. The article challenges a narrow view of agency that equates it only with public visibility, formal authority, or authorship. It argues for a broader understanding that includes the strategic choices made within severe constraints.
- **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS):** A framework that emphasizes the value of traditional, indigenous, and lived forms of knowledge, often transmitted orally or through practice, which are not always captured in formal, institutional archives. The article uses IKS to argue for valuing relational labour and experiential understanding.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis:** The dominant historical narrative of social change, by focusing solely on leaders and formal contributions, renders invisible the essential, often unrecognized, labour of women that sustains such movements. Recovering the lives of Ramabai and Savita Ambedkar is not about diminishing Dr. Ambedkar's legacy, but about providing a more complete, grounded, and truthful understanding of how that history was lived and carried forward.

- **Key Supporting Points:**

- **Ramabai's Role was Foundational:** Her life was defined by structural deprivation, yet she provided the essential "continuity labour." She managed economic fragility, endured the tragedy of losing four children, and created a stable domestic base, recognizing that her husband's intellectual work had a purpose beyond their immediate household.
- **Savita's Role was Enabling:** At a later stage, when Dr. Ambedkar's health was a major constraint, Savita's contribution was both personal and professional. She provided systematic health management, intellectual companionship, and was a sounding board for his late-stage manuscripts.
- **Recognition is Fragile:** Savita's life post-1956 demonstrates how quickly such contributions are forgotten or even met with suspicion. Despite her proximity to his work, she faced exclusion, highlighting the precariousness of recognition for women who work alongside male leaders.
- **Redefining Agency:** The article argues that agency must be seen not just in public action, but in the capacity to "manage constraint, sustain purpose, and absorb pressure" over long periods. This reframing allows us to see the profound strength and strategic judgment in both women's lives.
- **Methodological Openness:** To uncover such histories, we must move beyond official archives and be open to personal narratives, community memory, and frameworks like IKS that value lived experience.

- Historical evolution of the issue
 - A. Pre-independence and early 20th century
 - Social reform movements in India (Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, non-Brahmin movements, Dalit movements) already had women who managed community kitchens, night schools and safe houses.
 - Yet mainstream nationalist histories foreground a small set of names, largely upper-caste and male, sidelining the domestic sphere.
 - B. Mid-20th century and decolonisation period
 - Around the time of intense anti-caste and constitutional struggles, partners of leaders handled migration to cities, urban survival, children's education, and extended family obligations.
 - They often shifted between rural–urban spaces, negotiated with landlords and creditors, and acted as informal counsellors to young activists.
 - C. Post-independence historiography
 - Early nationalist historiography celebrated “great men” and a few exceptional women who took to public platforms.
 - Feminist historians from the 1970s onwards began recovering women's voices, but still, wives of male leaders from oppressed communities received limited attention compared to upper-caste icons.
 - D. Contemporary debates
 - Current scholarship emphasises intersectionality, subaltern studies, and everyday histories.
 - There is now a growing effort to document letters, oral testimonies and non-official sources to reconstruct the lives of spouses, co-workers and caregivers of major figures.
 - This trend is gradually influencing school curricula, popular biographies and public commemorations.

Hidden Figures: The Unseen Architects of Social Transformation

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**THE GREAT MAN &
FORMAL INSTITUTIONS**

**INVISIBLE LABOR &
THE CARE ECONOMY**

**THE ANATOMY OF
INVISIBLE LABOR**



RELATIONAL & CONTINUITY LABOR:
Work that sustains households and movements but remains unrecognized and unpaid in formal economic terms.



THE CARE ECONOMY AS AN ENABLER:
Domestic management and health supervision are not just "duties," but essential conditions for historical outcomes.

REDEFINING HISTORICAL AGENCY



AGENCY WITHIN CONSTRAINT:
Capacity to act independently and make strategic choices even under severe systemic deprivation.



EXPANDING THE ARCHIVE:
Recovering history requires looking beyond official records to oral memories and lived experiences.



INTELLECTUAL SCAFFOLDING:
Organizing documents and managing health directly extends a leader's capacity to produce monumental work.



RAMABAI AMBEDKAR

MODEL OF AGENCY: CONTINUITY LABOR

- **Primary Characteristic:** Managing structural deprivation and economic fragility to ensure project stability.
- **Historical Example:** Ramabai Ambedkar



SAVITA AMBEDKAR

MODEL OF AGENCY: ENABLING AGENCY

- **Primary Characteristic:** Systematic health management and intellectual/professional companionship.
- **Historical Example:** Savita Ambedkar



GS SYLLABUS INTERSECTION:

Highly relevant for GS Paper 1 (Society/History) and GS Paper 4 (Ethics of Care).

Logical and philosophical base

A. Logic of structural dependence

The argument rests on the simple logic that high-impact public work is time- and energy-intensive.

If a person is constantly writing, travelling, and fighting legal–political battles, someone else must absorb household and emotional burdens.

Thus, any realistic account of social change must treat this support as part of the movement itself.

B. Feminist and egalitarian philosophy

The piece is grounded in feminist ethics that value care, relationality and interdependence as morally significant, not secondary.

It challenges liberal individualism that treats achievements as personal merit detached from social support structures.

Philosophically, it expands notions of “justice” to include recognition of unpaid care work and emotional labour.

C. Epistemological critique

The text implicitly asks: “What counts as knowledge and evidence in history?”

If we only rely on official documents and published writings, we will naturally over-represent already powerful voices.

The call is to broaden epistemology: include oral traditions, family narratives, marginal archives, and interpret silences as data.

- Multidimensional analysis

- Social dimension

- Highlighting hidden figures challenges patriarchal and caste-based hierarchies in families and movements.
- It offers role models of quiet resilience and agency, expanding the idea of leadership beyond oratory and formal office.
- It also opens conversations on mental health, caregiving burnout and intra-family negotiations.

- Political dimension

- Recognition of caregivers can influence party structures and movement organisation—e.g., support cells for families of activists, health funds for long-term leaders.
- The theme aligns with debates on representation of women and marginalised communities within political parties and legislatures.

- Legal dimension

- Connects with domestic worker rights, matrimonial property rights, maintenance and alimony, old-age security, and social security codes.
- Raises questions about whether unpaid caregiving should be considered in compensation schemes, pensions, and property disputes.

- Ethical dimension

- Engages ethics of gratitude, fairness and distributive justice within families and organisations.
- Raises questions: Who gets credit? Who bears cost? Can we morally justify heroic narratives that erase support systems?
- Also relevant for professional ethics—acknowledging contributions of junior staff, assistants, community workers.

- International dimension

- Globally, feminist movements, care-economy research and UN debates on gender equality emphasise invisible labour.
- International indices like HDI, Gender Development Index, and SDG frameworks increasingly factor unpaid care work into policy analysis.

- Economic dimension

- Unpaid care work, if monetised, would add significantly to national income estimates; some countries conduct time-use surveys to approximate this.
- Policies like maternity benefits, caregiver allowances, flexible work arrangements, and universal basic services are economic responses to this recognition.

- Linkages with NCERTs
- **Class 6–8 History (Our Pasts series):** Themes on everyday life in different periods; you can introduce examples of lesser-known contributors, not only kings and leaders.
- **Class 9 History – “Socialism in Europe and the Russian Revolution” / “Nazism and the rise of Hitler”:** Sections on everyday life and gender roles help draw parallels to how women’s labour sustains political regimes and oppositions.
- **Class 10 History – “Nationalism in India”:** Movement narratives often omit domestic sphere contributions; teachers can supplement with case studies of women and families behind leaders.
- **Class 11 Sociology – “Introducing Sociology” & “Understanding Society”:** Chapters on social institutions (family, marriage, kinship) and social stratification (caste, gender) directly relate to intersectionality and unpaid labour.
- **Class 12 Sociology – “Indian Society” & “Social Change and Development in India”:** Chapters on “The Challenges of Cultural Diversity”, “The Story of Indian Democracy”, “Change and Development in the Family and Marriage”, and “Social Movements” fit well with this theme.
- **Class 11 Political Science – “Political Theory”:** Chapters on “Liberty”, “Equality” and “Justice” can use invisible labour as case studies to discuss substantive equality.
- **Class 12 Political Science – “Politics in India since Independence”:** While dealing with social justice, movements of Dalits, women and other marginalised groups, you can frame questions about who gets recorded as leader.





- Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus
- GS Paper 1
 - “Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present” – can include case studies of hidden contributors in social and political movements.
 - “Role of women and women’s organisations” – perfect place to discuss unpaid work and invisible activism.
 - “Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism” – unseen labour in building inclusive communities.
- GS Paper 2
 - “Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, governance issues and challenges” – governance responses to care economy and social security.
 - “Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections” – schemes for women, domestic workers, widows, old-age pensions.
 - “Role of civil services in a democracy” – need for sensitivity to invisible labour when designing policy.
- GS Paper 3
 - “Inclusive growth and issues arising from it” – inclusive growth must account for unpaid care work and informal labour.
 - “Indian economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment” – valuation of unpaid work, labour force participation of women.
 - “Infrastructure: health, education, human resources” – caregiving and human capital.
- GS Paper 4 (Ethics)
 - Topics: empathy, compassion, family values, work-life balance, conflict of interest between public duties and family responsibilities.
 - Case studies can explore dilemmas: an officer balancing high-pressure posting with caregiving duties, or acknowledging subordinates’ invisible contributions.

Way forward

Historiographical reforms

- Encourage biographies and textbooks that include family members, caregivers and grassroots organisers, not just central leaders.
- Promote use of oral histories, local archives and community memory projects in academic research and school projects.

Policy measures

- Strengthen time-use surveys and include unpaid care work in national statistical accounts in some form (satellite accounts, analytical chapters).
- Expand social security for caregivers: pensions for unpaid homemakers, caregiver allowances, health insurance, support for families of activists and human rights defenders.

Educational strategies

- At school and college level, use project work to document stories of local “hidden figures” – midwives, teachers, community volunteers, families behind social workers.
- In civil-services training, sensitise officers to invisible labour in policy design (e.g., how a new policy affects unpaid work burden).

Cultural and social change

- Promote shared household responsibilities through campaigns, workplace policies (paternity leave, flexible hours), and community discussions.
- Recognise and celebrate caregivers through awards, public commemorations and institutional acknowledgements.

Ethics and organisational practice

- Introduce norms of fair credit and acknowledgement in research, activism and administration, so that co-workers, staff and families are publicly appreciated.
- Build mental-health and caregiver-support systems inside movements and institutions to prevent burnout.

- UPSC CSE Mains – GS 1
- 2013 GS1: “Discuss the contribution of women to the freedom struggle, especially the role of women from different regions.”
- 2014 GS1: “How do you explain the success of the civil disobedience movement? Highlight the role of women.”
- 2018 GS1: “Throw light on the significance of thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi in the present times.” (Can be linked via ethics of care, constructive work).
- 2021 GS1: “Examine the role of women in making society more inclusive and participative.”
- UPSC CSE Mains – GS 2
- 2013 GS2: “The rights of women in India are still a myth.” Examine.
- 2015 GS2: “Do you think that increasing participation of women in decision-making will help in tackling problems of women?”
- 2019 GS2: “Discuss the causes of low female labour force participation in India.” (Unpaid care work is central.)
- UPSC CSE Mains – GS 3
- 2014 GS3: “Explain how inclusive growth can be achieved through skill development of women.”
- 2020 GS3: “How far is skill development important for inclusive growth? Discuss. (Can be adapted to unpaid care work and informal sector.)
- UPSC CSE Mains – GS 4 (Ethics)
- 2013 GS4: “What do you understand by ‘emotional intelligence’ and how can it be developed in public servants?” (Care work as emotional labour.)
- 2015 GS4 Case Study: Balancing family obligations with professional duties.
- 2018 GS4: “Explain how ethics of care differs from ethics of justice. Illustrate with suitable examples.”

PAKISTAN'S NEWEST WAR, AFGHANISTAN

The hardened fighters of the Taliban will resort to standard hit-and-run tactics, striking targets in a slow bleed that could tie down the Pakistani army interminably.



AMIT SINHA
COLUMNIST

The inmates at the drug rehabilitation facility in Kabul were just breaking their fast, when the Pakistani air attack struck. The Pakistani aircraft were ostensibly trying to hit a Taliban ammunition dump, but, when the smoke and debris cleared around 400 persons were killed and 260 wounded in what was Pakistan's deadliest attack on civilians in Afghanistan. The only saving grace of the carnage was that it finally forced the two bickering neighbours to call off the fighting for the holy day of Eid. But this temporary ceasefire is unlikely to bring an end to the conflict. If anything, it could only intensify thereafter.

This is not the first time that the two sides have clashed. Fighting had broken out between Afghanistan and Pakistan last October, when Pakistan launched airstrikes deep inside Afghan territory in retaliation for a spate of attacks by Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) cadres in

Pakistan. Those attacks targeting the TTP bases and their chief Nazeer Wali Mehsud, achieved little, but caused civilian casualties on ground. Mehsud emerged unscathed the next day, promising revenge. Afghan retaliation saw cross-border firing with small arms, machine guns and even artillery across the 2,640-kilometre-long Durand Line (which the Taliban do not recognise and call "The Hypothetical Line"). Pakistani army posts and police stations were attacked and captured soldiers paraded. The ten-day conflict finally came to an end with a ceasefire brokered by Turkey and Qatar, but the sporadic fighting continued. And if anything, the wave of attacks by the TTP inside Pakistan only intensified.

Things came to another flashpoint this February when the TTP captured a series of military posts in Pakistan, even displaying captured prisoners on social media. Predictably, the Pakistani establishment refused to acknowledge the captured persons as their own. A spate of attacks deep inside Pakistan, including the targeting of a Shia mosque in Islamabad, brought the conflict to its very doorstep. These actions triggered Pakistani air strikes at Kabul, Kandahar and Paktika on the night of 27 February. But, while earlier strikes had targeted the TTP, these attacks were specifically directed at the



People walk past debris lying at the site of drug users rehabilitation hospital after Pakistani air strike in Kabul.

Afghan military and Taliban regime—ostensibly to teach them a lesson for supporting and nurturing the TTP—as Pakistan launched its grandiose named Op Ghazab-El-Haq (Op Righteous Fury).

Predictably, the Taliban responded with the wave of attacks all along the Durand Line capturing 19 Pakistani posts and killing an estimated 85 soldiers. The Pakistani Army too attacked inside Afghanistan, killing over 240 fighters (refuted by Afghanistan, which claims to have only lost 19) and capturing areas in the routes of infiltration

to establish a "buffer zone". The PAF also launched over 50 strikes inside Afghanistan—most of them hitting the famed Bagram airbase near Kabul and even striking the stronghold of Kandahar, where its secretive leader Habibullah Akhundzada, is reportedly based. The strikes achieved little, and even though the Taliban have no air defence system, they claimed to have downed an F-16 and captured its pilot (later revealed as a dummy even as they launched their own drone attacks inside Pakistani territory).

It is hard to imagine things

having reached such a stage between the two one-time allies. The Taliban entry into Kabul was hailed by Pakistan, who hoped that a pliant, eternally-grateful regime would provide the "strategic depth" they desperately crave. But instead, the Taliban regime proved obstinately independent in its policies, and simply shrugged off Pakistani influence. The victory of the Taliban also emboldened the TTP to intensify their own actions to establish an Islamic Emirate of Pakistan and impose their brand of hard-line Shariah law within the nation. The

departing of over 60,000 Afghan refugees also caused tremendous resentment. The TTP virtually holds sway in the rugged mountains of Waziristan, launching attacks at will, and then slipping back across the Durand Line. With over 800,000 troops, 6,000 armoured fighting vehicles and 4,600 pieces of artillery, along with 465 combat aircraft and around 260 helicopters, Pakistan holds a clear conventional edge. The Afghan Taliban has just around 172,000 fighters, six aircraft and 23 helicopters—Soviet era relics that are not in flying condition. But the mismatch does not matter. The hardened fighters of the Taliban, bolstered by captured stocks of weapons and equipment left behind after the chaotic US withdrawal in 2021, will not be engaged in pitched battles where numbers come to play. Rather, they will resort to standard hit-and-run tactics, striking targets in a slow bleed that could tie down the Pakistani army interminably.

Pakistan perhaps feels that this strong show of retaliation will change the behaviour of the Taliban and make it align support for the TTP. But that is unlikely. Although the Taliban never openly acknowledges its links with the TTP, they are considered. They cannot even hope to militarily crush the TTP. They can inflict damage—as they did when they launched OP

Zarb-e Adab in 2014, after the heinous Peshawar school attack. But, under pressure, the TTP will simply melt back across the Durand Line and then restart its actions with a vengeance. Nor can they hold on the captured areas inside Afghan territory where they hope to establish a "buffer zone". That will be militarily and logistically unsustainable. They have to address the roots of the problem, and that lies in its mistaken policies of sponsoring terrorism within its neighbours. These policies have come back to haunt it.

It is not just Waziristan that is on the boil. Freedom fighters in Balochistan too, could use this pre-occupation to enhance their actions, targeting the CPEC and ruffing the tenuous lines of communication running through the large desolate province. Both of Pakistan's Western provinces could then be dangerously near the brink.

To add to this, the Iran war has imposed severe economic costs and fuel shortages which will make it difficult to prosecute operations. As it is, Pakistan has been forced to close schools and government offices to save fuel. The turmoil within Iran (with whom it shares a 500 km border) can spill over to Balochistan and every province a Kurd insurgency. Pakistan is also in a bind whether to support the US—with whom it has just needed \$500—

or stand by its Islamic brethren. As it is, anti-US riots have claimed dozens within Pakistan. And should Saudi Arabia enter the war, will it be forced to take sides, to honour their "Mutual Defence Pact"? All this could add to the unrest and the Shia-Sunni divide within Pakistan.

Predictably, Pakistan has blamed India—without a shred of evidence—even provided a blanket name for all militants as Firqa al-Khawarij and Firqa al-Hudaybiyah—India sponsored terrorists. But India would not want things to go totally out of control. India's policies in Afghanistan and its engagement with the Taliban have paid off, especially after the visit of its foreign minister Amit Khan Muttagi to India, last year. India has agreed to resume developmental work and invest in mining and hydroelectric projects within Afghanistan. We need relative peace to ensure that these projects get underway. An open war between Afghanistan and Pakistan will severely destabilise the neighbourhood and stall our work. But having the Pakistani Army tied up along its western flank has its advantages. It weakens it further and prevents it from causing mischief elsewhere.

Amit Sinha is an author of several books and over 250 articles. He is a regular contributor to The Sunday Guardian.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan):** Also known as the Pakistani Taliban. It is an umbrella organization of various militant groups operating primarily from the tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Its goal is to overthrow the Pakistani state and impose its strict interpretation of Sharia law.
- **Durand Line:** The 2,640-kilometer-long border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, established in 1893 by an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand, the foreign secretary of British India, and the Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. Pakistan inherited this border after independence. Afghanistan has never officially recognized it, leading to perpetual territorial and tribal tensions.
- **Buffer Zone:** A neutral area created between two or more hostile powers to separate them and prevent conflict. In this context, it refers to Pakistan's military objective of seizing and holding a strip of territory inside Afghanistan to prevent TTP militants from using it as a staging ground for attacks.
- **Operation Zarb-e-Azb:** A major military offensive launched by the Pakistan Army in June 2014. It was initiated in the wake of the devastating attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. The operation targeted militant strongholds in North Waziristan, a key tribal agency, aiming to dismantle the TTP and its allied networks.
- **Fitna al Hind (or Fitna al Hindustan):** A term used by Pakistani state and military officials to label militant groups operating in Pakistan. It translates roughly to "the mischief/calamity from Hind (India)." This represents Pakistan's persistent narrative of linking internal security challenges to external sponsorship, specifically from India.
- **CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor):** A flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is a collection of infrastructure, energy, and transport projects linking Gwadar Port in southwestern Pakistan to China's Xinjiang province via a network of roads, railways, and pipelines.
- **Shia-Sunni Divide:** A fundamental schism within Islam, stemming from a historical dispute over the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad. In Pakistan, this theological divide has been weaponized for political and sectarian violence, with militant groups like the TTP often targeting Shia minorities.
- **Amir Khan Muttaqi:** The acting foreign minister of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. His name appears in the context of India's diplomatic engagement with the Taliban.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

Core Thesis: The escalating conflict between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban over the TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) is a strategic quagmire for Pakistan. Despite holding a clear conventional military advantage, Pakistan's tactics of cross-border strikes and threats are unlikely to change Taliban behavior and will instead entangle its army in a protracted, unwinnable guerrilla war. This conflict, coupled with internal instability in Balochistan and the economic fallout from regional wars, places Pakistan under immense, multidimensional stress.

Key Points and Supporting Evidence:

- **Ineffectiveness of Military Action:** The author argues that Pakistani airstrikes on TTP bases and Afghan Taliban positions are counterproductive. They cause civilian casualties, fail to eliminate TTP leadership (e.g., Noor Wali Mehsud surviving a strike), and provoke fierce retaliation. The Afghan Taliban's capture of 19 Pakistani posts and the downing of a drone (claimed as an F-16) demonstrate their ability to retaliate, despite inferior technology.
- **The Asymmetric Warfare Dilemma:** Pakistan's conventional edge (560,000 troops vs. 172,000 Taliban fighters) is rendered meaningless. The Taliban fighters, hardened by years of war and equipped with US-supplied weaponry left after the 2021 withdrawal, will not engage in pitched battles. Instead, they will use hit-and-run tactics, a "slow bleed" strategy that can tie down the Pakistani army indefinitely.
- **Unattainable Goals:** Pakistan's objective of forcing the Taliban to stop supporting the TTP is seen as unrealistic. The Taliban share a deep ideological bond with the TTP, whose goal is to establish an Islamic Emirate in Pakistan. The Taliban's actions are rooted in this ideological support, not merely strategic convenience. Similarly, the idea of holding a "buffer zone" inside Afghanistan is dismissed as militarily and logistically unsustainable.
- **Compounding Internal Crises:** Pakistan's security dilemma is not confined to the western border. The author highlights simmering insurgencies in Balochistan, where "freedom fighters" could exploit the army's preoccupation to target the CPEC. This would threaten the economic lifeline of Pakistan.
- **Economic and Regional Overstretch:** The economic costs of the Iran war (implied to be the Israel-Iran conflict) have led to fuel shortages and forced the closure of schools and offices. Turmoil in Iran could spill over into Pakistan. Pakistan is also caught in a diplomatic bind between its new-found alignment with the US and its traditional ties with Islamic nations like Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- **The India Factor:** The author posits that Pakistan's narrative blaming India is baseless. Conversely, India has a vested interest in stability. Its engagement with the Taliban (via the Muttaqi visit) aims to secure its developmental projects in Afghanistan. While an open war between Afghanistan and Pakistan destabilizes the region, a weakened Pakistani army tied down on its western flank is advantageous for India as it reduces Pakistan's capacity for "mischief" elsewhere.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence (1893):** The Durand Line is established by the British, dividing Pashtun tribal lands. This act creates a lasting grievance in Afghanistan and a border that is culturally and politically porous.
- **Post-Independence (1947-1990s):** Pakistan inherits the Durand Line. The issue of Pashtun nationalism (Pashtunistan) becomes a recurring point of contention with Afghanistan. Pakistan's support for the Mujahideen against the Soviet Union (1979-89) militarizes the region, creating a generation of battle-hardened fighters and a massive flow of weapons. This era seeds the rise of the Taliban.
- **1990s - Rise of the Taliban:** The Taliban emerges in the early 1990s from Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. Pakistan, along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is one of the few countries to recognize the Taliban government (1996-2001). The TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) forms in 2007 as a coalition of Pakistani militant groups, inspired by and often operating in concert with the Afghan Taliban.
- **Post-9/11 (2001-2014):** Pakistan joins the US-led "War on Terror." It launches military operations in its tribal areas (e.g., Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014) but is accused by the US and Afghanistan of maintaining ties with certain militant factions for "strategic depth." These operations push TTP fighters across the border into Afghanistan, where they find sanctuary.
- **US Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover (2021):** The chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan leads to the Taliban's rapid return to power. This emboldens the TTP and provides them with a sympathetic, ideologically aligned neighbor in control of the state. The Taliban's victory is a major morale and logistical boost for the TTP.
- **Post-2021 Escalation:** The TTP intensifies attacks inside Pakistan, leading to a series of crises. Pakistan conducts airstrikes inside Afghanistan in 2022 and a major operation (Operation Righteous Fury) in February 2023, leading to intense cross-border clashes. The pattern of retaliation and counter-retaliation is set.

An analysis of the escalating security crisis between Pakistan and Afghanistan and its regional implications.

GEOPOLITICAL PILLARS & TERMS



FAILED "STRATEGIC DEPTH"
Pakistan's doctrine of cultivating a compliant Afghan regime to secure its western flank.



TEHRIK-I-TALIBAN PAKISTAN (TTP)

An Islamist umbrella group targeting the Pakistani state, ideologically aligned with the Afghan Taliban.



THE DURAND LINE (1893):
A 2,640km porous border unrecognized by Kabul, serving as a perennial source of conflict.



THE "BLOWBACK" & SECURITY DYNAMICS



THE FRANKENSTEIN SYNDROME
Former state-nurtured proxy groups turning against their benefactors in a classic policy blowback.

ASYMMETRIC "SLOW BLEED"



PAKISTAN MILITARY
(560k Conventional Troop Force)



AFGHAN TALIBAN / TTP
(172k Taliban Fighters)
Use hit-and-run tactics against Pakistan's conventional force.

SECURITY COMPARISON

ATTRIBUTE	PAKISTAN MILITARY	AFGHAN TALIBAN / TTP
Strategy	Conventional Warfare	Asymmetric/Guerrilla
Primary Weaponry	Heavy Artillery/Jats	Abandoned US Hardware/Night Vision
Main Challenge	Economic Drain & Terrain	Lack of International Recognition



ARSENAL UPGRADE
Insurgents now utilize sophisticated, abandoned Western military hardware left behind in 2021.

REGIONAL IMPACT & INDIA'S STANCE



ECONOMIC & INFRASTRUCTURE RISK
Escalating border conflict threatens CPEC projects and strains Pakistan's fragile, fuel-short economy.



INDIA'S PRAGMATIC REALISM
Moving from non-recognition to selective engagement with Kabul to protect developmental interests.

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Realist Logic:** The entire situation is analyzed through a realist lens. States (Pakistan, Afghanistan) act in their self-interest to ensure security. Pakistan's logic is that it must retaliate forcefully to change the Taliban's behavior through coercion. The Taliban's logic is to support its ideological brethren (the TTP) to maintain influence and project power, while resisting Pakistani encroachment on its sovereignty. The assumption is that military power can shape political outcomes.

- **Assumptions of the Argument:**

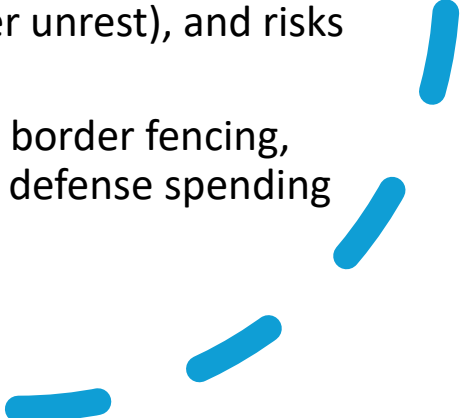
- **Pakistan's Assumption:** The core assumption of Pakistan's policy is that a "strong show of retaliation" will force the Taliban to alter its cost-benefit calculus and abandon the TTP. The author argues this assumption is flawed because it underestimates the ideological bond and the Taliban's own sense of sovereignty.
- **The Author's Assumption:** The author operates on the assumption that Pakistan's policies are self-defeating and that its military power is ill-suited for this type of conflict. He assumes that the TTP's ideology is so fundamental that no external pressure can sever the Taliban's support for it.

- **Philosophical Foundations:**

- **Hobbesian State of Nature:** The border region is depicted as a "war of all against all" where there is no overarching sovereign authority. The Durand Line is a disputed, un-policed frontier where force is the primary arbiter of disputes. The conflict reflects the insecurity inherent in a system where states compete for power.
- **Clash of Civilizations (Contextual):** The article subtly touches on the ideological dimension, where the Taliban and TTP's objective of establishing a "hard-line Shariat law" represents a fundamentalist worldview clashing with the modern nation-state concept. This is not a clash of civilizations but a clash within Islamic civilization about the nature of state and society.
- **Blowback:** The situation is a classic case of blowback—the unintended consequences of covert operations and policies that come back to harm the sponsor. Pakistan's long history of supporting Islamist militant groups to achieve strategic objectives has now produced an internal threat and a hostile neighbor.



- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social:** The conflict perpetuates a massive humanitarian crisis, leading to civilian casualties, internal displacement, and the forced repatriation of refugees, which breeds deep-seated societal resentment.
 - **Political:** It strains civil-military relations and creates a continuous state of emergency that undermines democratic institutions and political stability.
 - **Legal:** Cross-border airstrikes in pursuit of militants raise complex questions regarding international law, state sovereignty, and the legal status of unrecognized borders.
 - **Ethical:** Using human populations as shields, conducting strikes on civilian infrastructure (like rehab centers), and the historical use of terror as statecraft present profound ethical violations.
 - **International:** The instability threatens regional peace. It draws the concern of neighbors like India (who prefer a stable environment for developmental diplomacy) and Iran (facing its own border unrest), and risks pulling external powers back into a volatile region.
 - **Economic:** The destruction of trade routes, the cost of border fencing, and the diversion of capital from human development to defense spending trap the region in poverty.
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Linkages with NCERTs

Class 12 Political Science – Contemporary World Politics

- Chapters on “Security in the Contemporary World” and “Globalisation” discuss non-traditional security, terrorism, and interdependence.
- Useful for understanding how internal conflicts with cross-border dimensions reshape notions of security.

Class 12 Political Science – Politics in India Since Independence

- Chapter on “India’s External Relations” and sections on India–Pakistan and India’s neighbourhood policy.
- Helps situate the Afghanistan–Pakistan issue within India’s regional security environment.

Class 11 Political Theory

- Chapters on “Peace”, “Rights” and “Citizenship” provide conceptual tools to evaluate human rights, just war, and state responsibilities in counter-insurgency.

Class 12 History – Themes in Indian History, Part 3

- The Cold War and decolonisation context helps understand how borders like the Durand Line and proxy wars emerged from colonial and Cold War politics.

Class 11 Sociology – Introducing Sociology

- Chapters on social change, stratification and community can be used to analyse tribal societies, identity and the impact of prolonged conflict.

- Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus
- GS Paper 1 (History and Society)
- Post-independence consolidation and reorganisation of states (for border regions and tribal areas).
- Role of communalism, regionalism and secularism in shaping politics and conflict.
- Social impact of war, displacement and radicalisation.
 - GS Paper 2 (Polity and International Relations)
- India's neighbourhood relations, especially with Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Functions and responsibilities of security agencies, challenges to internal security.
- International organisations and global "war on terror".
- Issues of refugees, cross-border migration and human rights.
 - GS Paper 3 (Security and Economy)
- Internal security: terrorism, insurgency, role of external state and non-state actors.
- Border management and challenges in difficult terrain.
- Linkages of terrorism with organised crime, arms and drug trafficking.
- Impact of internal security on economic development and infrastructure projects.
 - GS Paper 4 (Ethics)
- Ethical issues in international relations and funding of non-state actors.
- Concepts like just war, proportionality, responsibility to protect civilians.
- Moral responsibility of state actors when short-term strategic goals conflict with long-term ethical considerations.

Way forward

Holistic counter-insurgency approach

- Combine targeted security operations with political outreach, economic packages, and community-level engagement in border regions.
- Strengthen local governance, policing and justice systems rather than relying solely on the army.

Regional diplomacy and confidence-building

- Encourage structured dialogue between Pakistan and the Taliban government over cross-border militancy, backed by regional platforms.
- Promote joint border mechanisms, intelligence sharing and development projects so that both sides gain from stability.

De-radicalisation and narrative change

- Invest in education, especially for youth, and in alternative religious narratives that stress peace and pluralism.
- Engage traditional tribal elders, civil society, ulema and media to delegitimise extremist ideology.

Socio-economic integration of frontier areas

- Upgrade infrastructure, connectivity, health and education to make militancy less attractive.
- Encourage legal cross-border trade to replace smuggling and war economies.

Reform of security doctrine

- Move away from reliance on militant proxies and strategic depth concepts.
- Emphasise rule of law, accountability of security forces, and transparency to rebuild public trust.

Global support with conditions

- International donors and neighbours can support reconstruction and institution-building, but with safeguards to prevent funds from fuelling corruption or extremism.
- Promote regional connectivity projects in a way that includes local communities as stakeholders.

- UPSC CSE – Prelims
- Questions on:
 - Durand Line and which countries it separates.
 - Location of Khyber Pass, Wakhan Corridor, and other Afghan–Pakistani geographic features.
 - Identification of militant organisations and whether they are designated terrorist groups.
 - Belt and road / CPEC related geography.
- UPSC CSE – Mains
- **GS–2**
 - Discuss India’s relations with its neighbours, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan (repeatedly asked).
 - “How do India’s interests and security concerns get affected by the instability in Afghanistan?”
 - “What are the challenges of managing India’s borders with Pakistan and China? Suggest measures.”
 - “Non-state actors in international relations pose both challenges and opportunities. Comment.”
- **GS–3**
 - “Terrorism and insurgency are major threats to internal security in India. Examine the role of external state and non-state actors.”
 - “Discuss the challenges of securing India’s land borders and coastline.”
 - “How do extremist ideologies spread through social media and transnational networks? Suggest counter-measures.”



• Key Terms and Explanations

- **Multidimensional Containment:** A geopolitical strategy where established powers attempt to limit the rise of a new regional or global power not just through military encirclement, but via economic, technological, and narrative warfare.
- **Salami-Slicing Tactics:** A strategy involving a series of small, incremental territorial or strategic actions. Because each action is minor on its own, it avoids triggering a major war or forceful response, but cumulatively results in significant strategic gains (often associated with border incursions).
- **Non-State Actors and Mercenaries:** Armed individuals or groups operating outside the formal control of a sovereign state. Modern proxy warfare increasingly utilizes foreign mercenaries to create plausible deniability while destabilizing border regions.
- **Normative Warfare (Informational Containment):** The use of international norms, indices, and watchdogs (e.g., commissions on religious freedom or human rights) as geopolitical tools. The aim is to delegitimize a rising power's domestic institutions and create a narrative of internal intolerance to justify external sanctions or diplomatic pressure.
- **Free Movement Regime (FMR):** A mutually agreed arrangement between two countries sharing a border (like India and Myanmar) that allows tribes living along the border to travel a certain distance into each other's territory without a visa. When exploited by insurgents, it becomes a security vulnerability.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

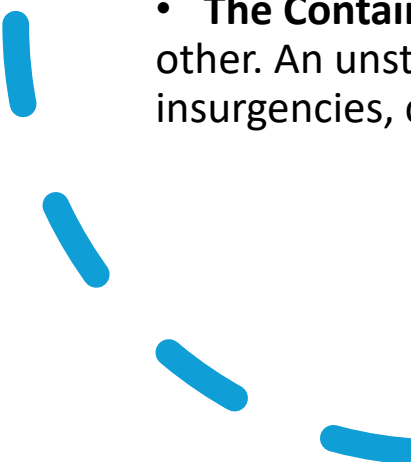
- The core conceptual thesis is that emerging civilizational states face a complex "containment loop" designed to keep them politically distracted, territorially insecure, and internationally defensive.

- **The Dual-Front Hard Power Squeeze:** A rising power often has to contend with hostile neighbors acting in tandem—one pressing territorial claims through infrastructure build-up and incremental incursions, and the other utilizing asymmetric proxy warfare and terrorism.

- **Vulnerability of Peripheral Geographies:** Porous, difficult terrains—like the 1,643 km Indo-Myanmar border—act as strategic fault lines. The influx of refugees, smuggling of advanced weaponry (like drones), and the presence of foreign combatants blur the lines between domestic law-and-order and international proxy war.

- **Weaponization of Civilizational Identity:** There is a concerted effort by external global architectures to brand indigenous, civilizationaly rooted political and cultural movements as "extremist." By attempting to sanction domestic intelligence or socio-cultural organizations, external actors aim to limit the state's room for sovereign maneuvering.

- **The Containment Loop:** Border instability (hardware) and ideological delegitimization (software) feed into each other. An unstable border invites international scrutiny, while international narrative attacks embolden domestic insurgencies, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of containment.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Colonial Legacy (Pre-1947):** The drawing of arbitrary borders by colonial powers (like the Durand and McMahon lines) divided ethnic communities, laying the perpetual groundwork for modern border disputes and insurgencies.
- **The Cold War Era:** Emerging nations like India opted for Non-Alignment to escape the binary containment strategies of the US and USSR. However, geopolitical tilts (like the US-Pakistan axis in the 1970s) forced localized strategic containment.
- **The Rise of Asymmetric Warfare (1980s-2000s):** Direct wars became too costly, shifting the focus to state-sponsored terrorism and proxy wars, heavily impacting border states like Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.
- **The Contemporary Era (2010s-Present):** The rise of China and its "String of Pearls" strategy introduced economic and maritime encirclement. Simultaneously, the digital age birthed informational warfare, where global narratives and "human rights" indices are weaponized to constrain rising powers. The post-2021 instability in Myanmar has opened a new flank of vulnerability in the East.

Breaking the Loop: India's Multi-Domain Containment & The Path to Strategic Autonomy

THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONTAINMENT LOOP (The Problem)



Salami-Slicing & Asymmetric Proxies

Incremental territorial gains combined with non-state mercenaries create a "dual-front hard power squeeze."

Normative & Informational Warfare

Weaponizing international indices and human rights watchdogs to delegitimize domestic sovereign institutions.

THE FACES OF CONTAINMENT

Territorial		Salami-Slicing & Mercenaries	Forced Militarization & Resource Drain
Informational		Biased Indices (e.g., USCIRF)	Reputational Damage & Sanctions Risk
Economic		Illicit "Golden Triangle" Trade	Parallel Black Economy & Hinderance to Growth

THE PATH TO STRATEGIC AUTONOMY (The Solution)



Proactive "Multi-Alignment"

Diversifying strategic portfolios to ensure no single bloc dictates domestic policy.



Narrative & Institutional "Atmanirbharta"

Creating independent, world-class think tanks to shape indigenous intellectual frameworks and stories.



Smart Border Management (CIBMS)

Replacing physical barriers with thermal imaging, drones, and deep economic integration.

- Logical and philosophical base of the arguments
- **Realist lens in international relations**
 - The arguments rest heavily on realist assumptions: states pursue power, rivals use every instrument—military, economic, ideological—to limit India’s rise.
 - Security is seen as zero-sum: gains for adversaries are losses for India; thus vigilance and hard power are central.
- **Complex interdependence and vulnerability**
 - At the same time, the piece implicitly accepts that India is integrated into global networks—trade, finance, information, norms.
 - Therefore, pressures can come through global institutions and narratives, not just tanks or missiles.
 - Philosophically, this reflects a view that sovereignty is porous in a globalized world.
- **Constructivist insight: power of narratives**
 - Identity, ideas and perceptions matter: how India is framed—as pluralist democracy or majoritarian state—shapes alliances, investments, tourism, academic collaborations.
 - Thus, the battle over terms like “extremist”, “persecuted minorities”, “authoritarianism” is not semantic; it is material.
- **Internal cohesion as strategic asset**
 - The underlying assumption is that domestic unity, inclusive nation-building, and resilient institutions are the best defence against external containment.
 - Philosophically, it resonates with Kautilya and Gandhi alike: internal decay invites external aggression.
- **Liberty vs security dialectic**
 - The piece indirectly wrestles with the philosophical dilemma: to what extent can the state centralize and securitise in the name of combating containment without undermining the very democratic values it seeks to defend?
 - This links to liberal political philosophy on rule of law, checks and balances, and limits of state power.

- Multidimensional analysis
- a) Social dimension
- Containment strategies often exploit social cleavages—religion, caste, ethnicity, region, language.
- Communal riots, hate speech, or targeted misinformation weaken national cohesion and provide raw material for hostile narratives.
- Strengthening social capital, inter-community dialogue, and equitable development becomes part of national security.
- b) Political dimension
- Domestic political competition can intersect with external pressures; parties may use foreign criticism as a tool against rivals or as proof of alleged bias.
- Federal tensions (Centre–state relations in border regions) influence implementation of security and development policies.
- Political polarization can narrow the space for bipartisan national-security consensus.
- c) Legal dimension
- The Constitution provides both security-enabling tools (Emergency provisions, AFSPA-type laws under parliamentary authority, preventive detention within limits) and strong Fundamental Rights.
- Supreme Court jurisprudence on privacy, sedition, internet shutdowns, and civil liberties shapes the permissible scope of state action.
- International law—human-rights treaties, customary law, UN procedures—adds another layer of obligations and scrutiny.
- d) Ethical dimension
- Ends-means debate: Is any method justified to protect the nation, or must methods themselves reflect constitutional morality and human dignity?
- Ethical governance demands transparency, accountability, minimal use of force, and respect for due process even in counter-insurgency.
- The state must avoid instrumentalizing minorities or dissidents as “enemies within” for short-term political gain.
- e) International dimension
- India’s rise as a major power provokes balancing behavior by some actors (China–Pakistan nexus, influence operations in neighborhood, contested narratives in multilateral forums).
- At the same time, India is courted as a partner in Indo-Pacific, climate action, and supply-chain resilience, giving it leverage to resist containment.
- Diaspora politics, refugee flows, and transnational activism connect India’s internal debates to global public opinion.
- f) Economic dimension
- Sanctions, investment ratings, trade preferences, technology restrictions can be used as economic levers of containment.
- Conversely, India’s large market, demographic dividend, and digital public infrastructure (UPI, Aadhaar stack) give it bargaining power.
- Long-term growth depends on maintaining rule of law, policy stability, and a perception of social harmony.

- Linkages with NCERTs
- **Class 9–10 Social Science (Democratic Politics, Contemporary India)**
 - Chapters on democracy, diversity, constitutional design, federalism, and challenges to democracy connect with internal cohesion, minority rights, and centre–state relations.
 - Useful to frame how domestic politics interacts with external pressures.
- **Class 11 Political Science – “Indian Constitution at Work” and “Political Theory”**
 - Topics: Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, role of judiciary, secularism, citizenship, rights of minorities, national integration, political ideology.
 - Directly relevant for debates on lawfare, civil liberties, nationalism, and state power.
- **Class 12 Political Science – “Contemporary World Politics” and “Politics in India since Independence”**
 - Cold War, Non-Alignment, globalisation, international organizations, human-rights regimes, India’s foreign policy, regional conflicts (Kashmir, Northeast, Sri Lanka).
 - Gives historical context to containment strategies and India’s responses.
- **Class 11–12 History (Themes in World History; Themes in Indian History, Part III)**
 - Decolonisation, nation-building, partition, integration of princely states, reorganisation of states, insurgencies and regionalism.
 - Helps understand borderland politics and legacy of colonial frontiers.
- **Class 11–12 Economics (Indian Economic Development, Macroeconomics)**
 - Globalisation, external sector, balance of payments, FDI, WTO; role of international institutions.
 - Connects with economic dimensions of containment—sanctions, trade dependence.
- **Class 12 Sociology – “Indian Society” and “Social Change and Development in India”**
 - Communalism, regionalism, caste, tribe, social movements, state and market.
 - Very useful for social and ethical angles: how internal fissures can be exploited.

- Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus
- GS Paper I
 - Salient features of Indian society; diversity, communalism, regionalism, secularism.
 - Post-independence consolidation and reorganisation, insurgencies, borderland politics.
 - World history: Cold War, non-alignment, decolonisation.
- GS Paper II
 - Functions and responsibilities of the Union and States; issues in federal structure; role of civil services.
 - Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and judiciary; pressure groups and NGOs.
 - India and its neighbourhood relations; bilateral, regional and global groupings; effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries.
 - Important international institutions, agencies and fora.
 - Government policies for security, minorities, border management.
- GS Paper III
 - Internal security: linkages of organized crime with terrorism; role of external state and non-state actors; challenges to internal security through communication networks; border management.
 - Cyber security, social media and internal security challenges.
 - Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges.
 - Science and technology, space, IT, IPR shaping security environment.
- GS Paper IV (Ethics)
 - Ethics in public administration; probity in governance; information sharing and transparency vs confidentiality.
 - Moral and political attitudes; social influence and persuasion.
 - Case studies on conflict between national security and civil liberties, minority rights, whistle-blowing.



- Way forward
- **Strengthen border governance with community partnership**
 - Invest in smart border management: better surveillance, legal trade routes, and quick-response forces, while avoiding over-militarisation of civilian life.
 - Deepen engagement with local communities through development, autonomy arrangements where appropriate, and inclusion in policing and intelligence (e.g., village defence volunteers, local police recruitment).
- **Institutionalise transparent and rights-respecting security laws**
 - Periodic parliamentary review of counter-terror and surveillance legislations; sunset clauses and strong oversight mechanisms (parliamentary committees, independent regulators, judicial review).
 - Clear standard-operating procedures to minimize misuse against peaceful dissenters, journalists, NGOs.
- **Build narrative resilience and strategic communication**
 - Professionalize government communication: timely factual briefings, multilingual outreach, rebuttal cells that counter disinformation without harassing citizens.
 - Encourage independent fact-checking, media literacy in schools, and ethical standards for platforms, so society can better distinguish genuine critique from propaganda.
- **Proactive diplomacy and norm-shaping**
 - Engage international bodies and foreign legislatures early; present India's perspective with data, field visits, and open dialogue rather than only reactive denial.
 - Lead on positive agendas—climate action, development partnerships, digital public infrastructure—so India is seen as a solution-provider, making containment politically costly for others.
- **Domestic inclusion as the ultimate shield**
 - Address legitimate grievances of minorities, tribes, and marginalized regions through fair representation, targeted development, and protection of cultural rights.
 - Promote civic nationalism rooted in constitutional values, where loyalty is to the Constitution rather than any narrow identity.

- UPSC CSE Mains
- **GS-II 2013:** “What are the main objectives of India’s foreign policy? How far has India been able to achieve these objectives?”
- **GS-II 2014:** Question on the role of NGOs, SHGs, and civil society in democracy.
- **GS-III 2013:** “What are the major internal security challenges in India? How are they linked to economic development?”
- **GS-III 2014:** “Discuss the linkages between development and spread of extremism.”
- **GS-III 2015:** Question on border management challenges in Northeast India.
- **GS-III 2016:** “The use of Internet and social media by non-state actors for subversive activities is a major security concern. How can it be addressed?”
- **GS-II 2016:** “The growing role of international agencies in domestic policy-making.”
- **GS-III 2017:** Question on cross-border terrorism and India–Pakistan relations.
- **GS-II 2018:** Question on “diaspora as soft power for India”.
- **GS-II 2019:** Question on India’s relations with neighbors and China’s influence in South Asia.
- **GS-III 2020:** Question on cyber security and social media as internal security threats.
- **GS-II 2021:** Question on “pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in polity”.
- **GS-III 2021:** Question on “non-state actors, especially in border areas, as a threat to internal security”.
- **Essay** (various years): topics on nationalism, security vs development, “Is growing intolerance a threat to democracy?” etc.



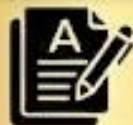
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