



Nickeled and Dimed

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Boycott China - Lessons For The Indian Economy

By Snehal Sreedhar



Image Source: Times of India

The Galwan Valley incident that took place in the early hours of 15th June has sparked massive patriotism and unity amongst citizens across all parts of the country. Around twenty soldiers were martyred in protecting a land that has only now become disputed, with its geographical alliance to India apparently opaque to the Chinese. The frail relations maintained between both the countries seems now to have been rendered more delicate with a mass uproar and anger that certainly wants a retaliation. With the current pandemic making the situation worse, revenge has become the only answer to conflict.

People have been destroying Chinese products, burning photos of the Chinese President Xi Jinping and conducting rallies with no regard to social distancing measures anymore. With such anger building up, even the middle-class and poorer sections of the society have expressed deep hatred towards our largest neighboring country. Some of these commoners own shops that sell Chinese products for a basic living and yet, support the incoming Boycott China movement.

On the 13th of May this year, PM Modi gave a speech on “Atmanirbhar Bharat”- a self-reliant India- by putting forth the Indian economy as the first step towards which this self-reliance could be achieved. This was done keeping in mind India’s global competitiveness that could be strengthened by supporting its MSME sector, which comprises 28% of the total employment of the country and has greater potential to accelerate India’s transition from an agrarian to an industrialized economy. The “Atmanirbharta” speech seems to have echoed louder now that it has been supplemented with the events that took place in Ladakh, especially as China occupies a major share in most of our goods markets. Chinese money runs rampant in the Indian economy, for example, its smartphones account for over 75% share of the Indian market for phones. India’s dependence on china can be valued at around \$52 billion; with it imports from China measuring up to approximately four times that of our exports to them. This dependence has, in fact, only been rising in compliance with the global market demand for Chinese goods, which begs the question – can India really boycott china before having become self-reliant, or in other words, could people refrain from succumbing to their immediate economic needs and instead uphold their patriotic respects to the country?

Trade ban has been favorably discussed as a response to the rising repulsion towards accepting Chinese products; however, this has been a highly criticized solution since our trade deficits are already high with China. This does not necessarily make us worse off, however, in a highly globalized world, the concept of comparative advantage and gains from trade make the movement more complicated and difficult in its implementation. Comparative advantage means that a country, for example India, is better off buying certain goods from China than it is from some other country. This has been the case particularly because of lower tariffs imposed on Chinese goods that make its products widely affordable, especially to the lower sections of the Indian society, even when placed in comparison with Indian goods. In the longer run, “Atmanirbhar” Bharat could achieve its goal of self-sufficiency but in the short term, this aversion towards trades with china do not seem to be economical. It, thus, becomes a matter of immediate concern because the concerns that are being questioned in this realm are those that could be shaped by our immediate actions. While shopkeepers show immense support for the Galwan Valley incident, most of them also do not prioritize losing their shelters over support for their soldiers in their north. At least, when it comes to keeping their own families alive, these shopkeepers and other such Indians cannot be blamed. They cannot even be blamed otherwise, or in any alternate scenario that makes the cost of being “Atmanirbhar” higher than the returns from it.

While it is true that even the richest often turn to Chinese products, they can still afford more expensive items as a cause for promoting self-reliance, an alternative that cannot be adopted by the poorer sections of the India society. “Atmanirbhar” Bharat can thus, only be achieved when the poorest lot dares to change their means of acquiring bare necessities, a path that is almost impossible unless there is huge backing from the government. While the government promises to support its local industries and demands its private sector to improve their products in quality to increase global demand for Indian products, it fails, however, to acknowledge the role of education in achieving this. India so far, is a huge labor market, which is a major factor in its position as the 5th largest economy in the world. However, India lacks leaders and other benefactors that could drive the country forward, not only in being quantitatively significant but also in becoming influential, which is another variant of its global ambition. The goal of self-reliance begins from its people, and people begin with knowledge and skill. It is important to remember that people are the drivers in growth, and if economy is the answer to growth, then people must be employed to their greatest capacity.

To Protest Nicely

By Purna Vij

The black lives matter protests that have gathered steam all across the United States of America are something that the country had last witnessed during the civil rights movement. The protests began with the murder of George Floyd, who was killed when a Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin took a knee to his neck on a mere suspicion. Three other police officers looked on and attempted to block the public from trying to save the man. This incident sparked protests around the country and the world. The Minnesota courts charged Derek Chauvin with third degree murder and arrested all the other police officers.

Third degree murder meant that the court believed the death of George Floyd was a mistake. This further sparked distress and anger after which the charges were changed to second degree murder. However, there were still angry protests that raged across the nation. Luxury condos were burnt down in Minneapolis and so was a police station. Target stores across the nation faced looting and people were on the streets breaking all rules they possibly could to protest what was an inhuman crime. In all this cacophony the idea of violence became this linear idea where Senator Tom Cotton opined that military action was the only way to stop civilian unrest. The question then becomes this- how do you effectively critique violence? How does violence tie back to the concepts and tropes of outlawry that have inevitably made its way into the consciousness of the American public? American history is rife with political revolutions that have been violent, be it the civil war, the civil rights movement or the Stonewall riots.



Image Source: <https://scroll.in/article/964202>

Violence has marked significant changes in the way marginalised communities have gained rights within the nation and to themselves. The bodies of black people and people of colour are rife with continued violence be it physical or even the mental strength that goes into constantly trying to protect yourself.

This is where a nuanced critique of violence is especially important. Is the fact that you wait for the system to buckle down and put a knee to your neck the only way you can physically fight back? Is violence an arbitrary term that can be declared as morally bad all the time or do we allow subjectivity to the act and the outcome of the act as well? Violence is being critiqued by people like Tom Cotton as being something as heinous as racism or systemic oppression. The equivalence that is pervading this thought is the fact that there is a sort of dictation as to how the people that have faced years of trauma should find a way to protest nicely. Violence is not bereft of social character and that has somehow gone unaccounted for. The fact that the very cities the protestors are attempting to burn- are the same ones that had constantly marked and systemically classified black people to places that weren't near their rich white neighbourhoods. The buildings are all ripe with violence that is inflicted on black bodies daily and constantly – the cities are all constant reminders of how black people were forced to build homes for masters that would never accept them into those homes. They are ripe with a racial bias so deep you can even see it in the way urban planning happens. Take one look at the outlaw tropes that have since long existed in the American media. Black people have been stereotyped and reduced to drug peddlers and criminals from broken homes. Harlem in New York was publicized as a place with no safety and exorbitant amounts of violence. That trope itself is what has made its way into the consciousness much like the caricatured Jew during Hitler's rule.

The argument then is this – are we in any position to dictate protests by holding violence as an arbitrary standard? Violence was what prompted the protests in the first place and violence is how the state exerts control over those that are marginalised, weak and unable to lobby for political mobilisation. So then, is our critique of violence an attempt at virtue signalling oppressed people and pushing them to conform to 'nicer' ways of protests- because let's face it, there are no nice ways to ask for your own emancipation. Black lives matter is a demand to give black people the right to their own bodies, but how do you do that when the state suspends the very writ that guarantees that? When the rights to your own body are hijacked and violently vandalised by the state itself, then how do you protest 'peacefully' or nicely? Is the constant pedestalization of verbal and 'peaceful' protests something that benefits the oppressor to talk his way out of being answerable and accountable for their wrongs? The right to protest is enshrined in the first amendment and the citizens have been on the streets protesting years of police brutality coupled with the systemic racism that have made life difficult for anyone that does not fit the box that white people deem fit. The police have however continued to crack down on peaceful protests as well. One such incident was the New York Police department driving an SUV into what was a peaceful protest. All revolutions have always been violent, even India that considers itself the bastion of nonviolence. The Indian Freedom struggle started with an extremely violent revolt of 1857. The Czars were overthrown only after a violent Bolshevik revolution. The Blacks were freed after a bloody civil war.

There needs to be better vocabulary and introspection about the nature of protests and the violence attached to it. The language needs to evolve, it needs to adapt in order to allow the oppressed to gain control over their own bodies and their own narratives. The stories and nuances cannot forever be written by those in power with privilege.

Searching for Fiscal Antidotes to COVID-19 - An analysis of Stimulus Packages.

By Advaita Singh

Under the COVID-19 Pandemic, lockdowns across the globe have burdened the governments with economic slowdowns. With fears of recessions and worries over slumping aggregate demand weighing over the states, most governments have resorted to fiscal measures to kick-start the economy. These fiscal policy changes have come under the name of 'stimulus packages'.

A stimulus package is a form of an expansionary fiscal policy; a mixture of incentives, tax rebates and government spending to stimulate economic activity during a financial crisis. In many cases, it also includes changes in laws and other structural changes to aid economic activity. The motive behind a stimulus package is to boost spending and subsequently, increase aggregate demand. Rising aggregate demand will help reduce any form of cyclical unemployment, which in turn generates further income and spending.

Sneak Peek into India's Package:

Like many other countries, India is also facing the economic crunch of low aggregate demand. The slowdown is expected to cause the economy to shrink as much as 45% annualised in the second quarter. As a response to this financial situation, PM Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharam announced the Rs. 20 trillion (USD 265 billion) stimulus package. This package is equivalent to 10% of the country's GDP and is similar in scale to some other rich OECD members. In his speech, the PM announced that the focus on the package will be on 'land, labour, liquidity and laws' with emphasis on empowering the poor, labourers, street vendors and migrant workers, in the unorganised and organised sectors. With uplifting the poor being the aim of the package, attention has also been given to the small and medium-sized enterprises.



Image Source: Financial Express

Support ranging from tax cuts to collateral-free loans has been extended to small-scale businesses in an attempt to revive the economy. The breakdown and key highlights of the package, to a great extent, reflect the same. The package has used an interesting mix of allowances, tax rebates, spending and structural changes. Pure spending in the form of direct support has been extended through free food for migrants costing around Rs 3,500 crore (Migrants without NFSA cards can avail 5 Kgs of wheat or rice per person and one kg channa per family per month for next two months). Other forms of direct injections included expenditure on infrastructure development, particularly agricultural infrastructure. One lakh crore has been allocated for post-harvest storage facilities and other farm gate infrastructure. An investment of Rs. 50000 crore has been made for Coal India Limited's enhanced new targets. New loan schemes have been introduced such as special loans for street vendors, to avail from the Rs 5,000 crore loan facility, in addition to the Rs 10000 working capital that will be provided to them. MSME's have been provided for using a Rs 3 lakh crore loan facility, which is made easier to avail by eliminating the need for collateral. These measures will help restart business activity and save jobs.

Strategising Stimulus Packages — Case in Point: India

There are various strategies and approaches to consider in formulating a Stimulus Package for this situation. Some countries might prefer a one-time support package to kick start the economic engine while others might prefer a staggered approach with multiple rounds of government support to slowly aid the economy in this long-drawn-out emergency. In India, for instance, when the breakdown of the stimulus package was released, it was found that government spending was actually around 1% of the GDP, much lower than expected. This has been praised by many strategists and economists as being a clever decision on the State's part to conserve resources for future need.

In strategising the allocation of funds, it is crucial to understand the end result. The pandemic has created, above all economic issues, a crisis of liquidity which has become the most urgent matter. Be it the migrant workers with no income sources or the businesses with all money tied up in fixed assets, there is a cash crunch that is preventing the economy from moving forward. Due to the relationship between liquidity and expenditure, there can be no spending if consumers are not do not have immediate access to cash. Similarly, there is no investment if business assets are caught in an illiquid form. The crisis of liquidity, to a great extent, is at the core of the problem of low aggregate demand. In other words, solving the liquidity crisis is a pre-requisite to reviving the economy. The Indian government is trying to address this problem by giving access to quick cash — through collateral-free loans, free of charge ration to free up income for spending etc. The government, being the spender of last resort, has to ensure liquidity and absorb risk, which is exactly what this stimulus reflects.

While many questions have been raised on the low direct government spending in the package, a different perspective states that there is no need for more spending since the economic slowdown will persist as long as the lockdown continues. Hence, it makes little sense to deploy major government resources until the country is not out of lockdown. Those extra resources should instead be spent on improving the health status of the country, especially since low economic activity has led to low revenue from direct and indirect taxes.

A fiery debate is on the rise with many different approaches and ideas on how to tackle this pandemic. As more and more countries come up with their own plans on reviving the economy, the debate on the effectiveness of any package will only exacerbate. It is for us to see, in the many months to come, which strategy has got the right antidote (pun intended).



The Airline Industry Post COVID-19

By Vanshika Mittal

During the last few years, there has been an increasing trend in companies to market their products or services as green or environmentally friendly as part of their corporate social responsibility. This has come along with many having to rethink their product or service, redesign its packaging or give back to the environment from their revenue through other projects.

In 2000, the International Air Transportation Association observed that the largest environmental challenge facing the airline industry is its growth rate. The environmental impact caused by such growth cannot be compensated by mere technological or operational advancements. The Covid-19 pandemic suspended almost all the airway travel as countries were working towards reducing the number of affected cases. This has finally allowed the airline industry a break where they can rethink their product and services in order to move away from being the largest source of carbon emissions and achieve sustainability.

Even though air travel provides enormous opportunities and closely connects people across the globe by reducing the time of travel, it conflicts with energy, food, freshwater demands and climatic changes. In the era of globalization, it is impossible to completely abort travelling by air but the bigger problem arises due to the way we have been capitalizing it. It has been estimated that by 2026, the world's jet fuel consumption is projected to grow from 95 billion gal (2007) to 221 billion gal per year. Globally, aviation fuel has been growing at about 4% per year with only a 1% increase in the fuel efficiencies.

A study was conducted in 2011, which lists viable alternate fuel sources to be algae, bacteria, crop residue and wastes. The new bio fuel needs to be secure, sustainable, economically viable and sufficiently available which brings us to the conclusion that we must use Earth's most abundant resources being biomass, solar energy, seawater and arid land. However to achieve this there needs to be a paradigm shift in our conception of, source of, use of and funding of the fuel.

Though this may seem far-fetched and ambitious, it is not impossible. The very first step needs to be taken up by governments to re-allocate their taxation and restrictions. On one hand, a highly competitive sector gave rise to cheap flights, which was only possible as the industry was given a free ride by the government. Aviation fuel is either completely untaxed or taxed significantly lower compared to other fuels. This is ironical since fuel is a commodity with ecological taxation i.e. the tax is levied not only to charge consumer fee but also to promote ecological sustainability. On the other hand, the biomass industry faces high volatile regulations and costing issues. This is despite reports stating that successful investments in biomass production creates more farming and production jobs in diverse fields. Yet it cannot compete with other fuels if it does not receive the same support and subsidies.



Image Source: ussc.edu.au

French finance minister, Bruno Le Maire has said that Air France would have to become the greenest airline in the world in return for the €7bn bailout package for the losses in times of the pandemic. Once again, despite being ambitious, this is not impossible to achieve. A similar incident occurred in 2001, where the air industry faced a decline in reservations and passenger traffic owing to the global economic downturn. Airlines all across demanded bailout packages from their governments. Amidst this chaos, Scandinavian Airlines CEO Jorgen Lindergaard announced that the airline would remain firm to their environmental commitments that were earlier released in the environmental report. However, the 'reduced flights' market scenario allowed the Scandinavian Airlines to achieve the best improvement in their environmental index that year. This market can be compared to the sluggish traffic that is estimated for several years post the coronavirus for people will not feel safe in travelling in large numbers.

The demand for the economic package has backfired from the side of many environmental agencies such as Extension Rebellion who have claimed that airlines should not be receiving any bailouts. After all, these monetary packages are taken out of public funds and it is strongly believed curbing frequent flying can benefit both public health and global environment. The current air travel has been divided in terms of essential and non – essential. If only essential flying is followed, interestingly the population will highly shrink with only 30 percent of its current size.

A reduced dependence on coal, gas and nuclear energies with the added efforts to deconstruct the capitalistic ways of production and consumption will cost more. This may also lead to a sudden conflict in the market with air tickets' prices shooting extremely high and the concept of low-cost carriers being eliminated. However, the scenario feels the right moment to tackle environment turmoil on a macroeconomic level that has always been kept aside in the name of economic prosperity.

Russian Private Military Companies and the evolution of Moscow's foreign policy

By Samarth Gupta

The recent withdrawal of Russian mercenaries from Libya is expected to give a decisive turn to the Civil war in Libya. These troops belonged to a Private Military Company (PMC) called Wagner and supported the troops of Khalifa Haftar, who has been fighting against the UN recognised Government of National Accords (GNA). In September of 2019, Wagner troops also poured into natural gas rich areas of Northern Mozambique to fight on the behalf of President Filipe Nyuse, against radical Islamic groups. While most prominent, Wagner is just one of the many Russian PMCs that have come to light in recent years. Therefore, it is important to question the intentions of the Kremlin with respect to deployment of these mercenary troops and what it tells about the Russian state and its foreign policy objectives.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian will and capacity to support a large and strong defence force was considerably lessened. Many of the military and intelligence professionals were laid off and in the chaos of law and order that followed soon after the collapse of USSR, private militias in service of corporates and organised crime syndicates sprang up all across Eastern Europe. While under the rule of President Vladimir Putin these private militias and criminal syndicates have been weakened significantly, the pool of security and armed forces professionals from the erstwhile USSR still provides ample opportunity for a PMC like Wagner to recruit and deploy mercenaries across key strategic regions.



Image Source: www.offiziere.ch

But while supply and recruitment of troops isn't a problem; why isn't the Kremlin cracking down on these outfits despite having rendered any private militia illegal within Russia? The answer to the question lies in key imperatives of Russia's ambitions as a great power and its economic interests in the regions where it has deployed these troops. While Moscow still lacks the capacity to confront the growing NATO and American influence in Middle East and Eastern Europe militarily, it has used PMCs like Wagner, Patriot and Vega to maintain a ground presence and protect Russia's economic and security interests.

The advantage that PMC offers to Russia is that of plausible deniability. While these PMCs can keep on pushing Russian interests where they are deployed, the casualties and setbacks suffered by them aren't the responsibility of Moscow. While the US and Turkey have frequently voiced their opposition to groups like Wagener, Russia hasn't taken responsibility for their actions and has conveniently avoided escalation. Since, PMCs are illegal under Russian law, their existence isn't acknowledged by Moscow. Hence, the use of PMCs provide Moscow the flexibility to follow its foreign policy objectives without fearing a backlash from rivals.

Additionally, these groups are also considerably cheaper to deploy as they don't demand the benefits of a regular standing army and are employed on contractual basis. Moreover their deployments enable Russian economy to reap benefits in the sectors where it is still competitive: Defence equipment and training and energy. Wagner group has used its troops in trying to secure oil fields across Libya and Syria, stabilizing the regime of Sudanese dictator Omar al-Bashir and securing access to diamond mines in the Central African Republic. This is supplemented by training of troops across these regions. Also, the cost of stationing these troops is borne by the contacting nations which makes them all the more lucrative options for Moscow.

But while the use of PMCs and mercenary troops gives Moscow benefits of flexibility and risk free troop deployments, its recent operations have been largely unsuccessful and marred by large numbers of tactical errors and high casualties. In early 2018 Wagner troops in an attempt to take an oil field in Deir ez-Zor, Syria; confronted US troops who called an airstrike that killed an estimated 300 Wagner soldiers in the first direct confrontation between Russian and American forces since the Vietnam War. Their campaigns in Libya and Northern Mozambique are also largely marked with disasters and high casualties. Hence, despite being an option at Moscow's disposal, their record has been largely disappointing.

The phenomenon of Russian PMCs reveals the disparity between Moscow's great power ambitions and its capacity to realise them. The Russian economy already much smaller than the United States, France, UK and Germany (leading NATO members) has further entered an era of stagnation following the Western sanctions of 2014 and dip in oil prices following the coronavirus pandemic. Hence, Moscow's already dwindling economic resources are going to prompt a decreased military spending and a non confrontational stance with the West. In such a scenario the use of PMCs is going to be important for Moscow as it fills the crucial gap within Russian foreign military engagement and also fuels its leadership's desire for an activist foreign policy and desire for a great power status.

Chaupadi Pratha: Menstruation in Nepal

By Vanshika Shah

There are many social stigmas attached to menstruation in different cultures across the globe and even in the 21st century, the roots of some unjust practices around menstruation, creep into our society.

The monthly expulsion of vaginal blood from a women's body is considered to be dirty and Hindu traditions have hence imposed restrictions on women while they menstruate. Chaupadi Pratha is one of those practices that is still prevalent in the western and midwestern parts of Nepal even though it was officially banned by law in 2005.

'Chhaupadi' is derived from a local word used in the Raute dialect where "chhau" means menstruation and "padi" means a woman. Chaupadi Pratha forbids menstruating women to socially interact with their family members and other people in their locality. They are alienated from the society and sent to cowsheds or small huts, mostly built by women themselves, to spend their menstruating days there. Most of these huts are barely as big as a closet with space just enough to fit one person, congested, dirty, and very flimsy.



Image Source: ussc.edu.au

Other than this, women are not allowed to touch utensils that are used daily at home, food prepared for other members, fruit-bearing crops, religious books/statues, or domestic animals. There are strict rules around water, which is considered pure in Hinduism. They are not allowed to use water extracted from communal sources and are forced to use secondary sources called the chaupadi dharas to bathe and wash their clothes. Women are considered impure in their menstruating days so if they dare to break any of these rules, it angers the lord, resulting in repercussions that are believed to negatively affect the whole family. If a woman accidentally touches something or anybody during these days, it needs to be cleansed or purified through cow urine which is considered holy.

There are different taboos and stories about the consequences of breaking tradition. A farmer named Runcho was interviewed and he said that "If a woman goes inside the family's home during her period, three things will happen; A tiger will come; the house will catch fire, and the head of the house will get sick." He also claimed to have lost his eyesight 10 years ago because her menstruating daughter accidentally brushed past him. This practice is a classic example of gaslighting women into believing that if they rebel against any of the traditions they would be responsible for hurting their family members and their community.

There are many problems that unravel from this tradition that now has become a part of their 'normal' lifestyle but can prove to be extremely oppressive and unhealthy. Firstly, this compromises the health of the women. Nutritious food is not available and dehydration is a common occurrence amongst women. Secondly, the living conditions are substandard. Menstrual days are the days that a woman needs to take extra rest and maintain more cleanliness. But the sheds are dirty, dingy, uncomfortably narrow and restrictions on water usage sometimes make water inaccessible at all times leading to infections. Many women and young girls are sexually assaulted or die of snake bites, smoke inhalation, and sometimes cold, every year but these cases are buried by the society and are not registered officially.

Psychologically, this also affects the self-esteem of women.

Not only are their studies and freedoms compromised, but also exploited, as the entire gender falls under the facade of faith. This encourages patriarchy and assigns women the role of being solely responsible for the wellbeing of their families. Women are left with no decision making power and have no choice but to adhere to the norms.

The prevalence of such a practice in today's times mirrors Nepal's inability to enforce laws, educate the masses, and spread awareness on women's rights. It is not only the men who force women out of their homes during their menstrual cycles but also many women who have internalized this tradition and coerce other women to follow these otherwise oppressive and unsafe practices.

Future Tenses by Nitasha Kaul

By Sahil Phillip

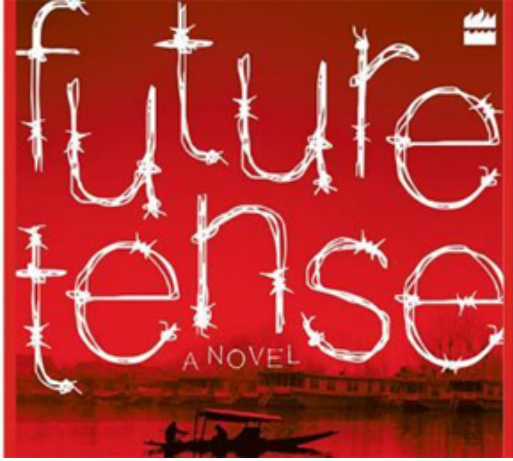


Image Source: westminster.ac.uk

“Bang! Bang! Bang! Gunshots rang out on the TV screen opposite; a famous daredevil south-Indian hero was making mincemeat of the villains. The sound did not bother her, barely penetrating the iron cloak of wretchedness that she wore.” This particular statement captured my imagination the most. The simplicity of the text was in stark contrast with the complexity of the environment around the protagonist, Zeenat. And I think it is these sentences that brilliantly capture the essence of Nitasha Kaul’s work.

My raison d’être for choosing this book was to delve deep into the dispute and to get a perspective of the life of people currently living in Indian Occupied Kashmir. A human perspective provides the faceless conflict a human face; one that we can picture and relate to. Nitasha Kaul brilliantly weaves the story of young Kashmiris living in contemporary times, as they struggle to live under the draconian fist of the state, with every movement of theirs being “treated with a suspicion that could escalate at the slightest hint and translate into the firing of pellets, if not bullets”. She expands the narrative of the Kashmir conflict through a human lens; focusing on the manner in which the ever pervasive nature of the conflict has spilt over to every crevice of the lives of the people.

Nitasha Kaul’s work centres on the lives of Fayaz, Zeenat, Shireen and Imran. It is through the eyes of these characters that she explores the haunting spectre of Kashmir, seen from an individual’s perspective. The book has been cleaved into three parts. The first explores Fayaz and Zeenat’s disintegrated marriage in which he “refused her the slightest of attention without letting her know the cause of his resentment”. His career choice of being a bureaucrat in a paralyzed system is compared to being disillusioned and he describes his marriage with Zeenat to be like Srinagar; “both harsh, unforgiving, resilient and indifferent to him.”

In the subsequent two parts of the book, Kaul explores the life of Fayaz’s nephew, Imran who is embroiled in a constant battle of having to choose his future from existing, if not, predetermined options. For Imran, whose life is about having his dreams disrupted many times, the quest is to unshackle himself from the chains of destiny. Shireen, meanwhile, is required to unlock and know her past so as to trudge on to the future. The emotional toll of the conflict leaves an indelible scar on each of the characters; affecting them in everyday lives. Through the convergence of their life stories, Kaul deftly manages to nail home the point of individual freedom being sacrificed for the traditions one’s family upholds; where political lineage remains sacrosanct, a social sacrilege if one were to deviate from.

Kaul’s chosen style of writing is unusual. Rather than upending a particular chronological order, she describes the past and the present in an almost effortless manner; where many a times, the characters are found reminiscing about their past so as to make sense of the present. So through the 300 odd pages that the Kaul guides you through, she successfully manages to amalgamate history, politics, facts and fiction. At particular moments, however, I felt a bit disconnected from the reader’s imagination and my own not keeping pace with the same. After careful perusal of the content, I could feel that the fervent usage of metaphors and analogies did serve no meat to the content at times; often ending up snowballing into unattractively overstretched articulations.

However, that said, there was one metaphor that I feel will be stuck on to me for time immemorial. She eloquently compares Kashmir to be that of a “woman’s body in the eyes of a man who seeks her and when they can’t have her, they force themselves.” A gendered perspective to the conflict certainly intrigued me and pushed me to read more research centric literature that Nitishi Kaul has contributed. In one of her seminal works on Kashmir, she argues that there has been a gender specific “exoticisation” of Kashmir as a territory, thereby making the Kashmiri cartography more feminine in nature. It is this very understanding of Kashmir as being feminised that has historically served as a driver to the masculine and patriarchal forcibility of the Indian state. This, she concludes, “makes the possession and control of Kashmir an integral part of the Indian nationalist imagination.”

The Kashmir conflict has always baffled me. As per Stoics’ doctrine of Oikeiosis, human affection radiates outward from one self, that is to say it diminishes as distance grows from oneself. However, as I have found myself discussing the Kashmir issue with my peers, the insular and hyphenated claims have always seemed so emotional and over the top. Despite one not knowing the truths and hardships of the people suffering, Kashmir always serves close to our heart. Rather than relying on the everyday news being read, churned by the state machinery.

As I flicked through the last pages and submissively kept down my book, I realised it was 4am in the morning and it would only be a couple of hours before my mother would get up for her morning walks. But before sleep took me to the enchanted lands of honey and rainbows, I felt myself diving into an introspection regarding my perception about Kashmir. The faceless conflict, I feel, has finally been humanised in my world; a sense of colour being splashed onto a white canvas. The emotional toll of the conflict left an indelible scar on each of the characters; affecting them in their everyday lives. This reminds me of the individuals mired in the daily conflict; having their own aspirations and desires to fulfil. Kaul has successfully managed to paint contemporary Kashmir; with the underbelly of its raw beauty being submerged in the turmoil of its people.



Behind The Scenes - A Glimpse.

Who we are

Behind the Scenes (BTS) is a social benefit initiative that aims to foster the all-round growth and development of those around us, who do not have equal access to opportunities and benefits. It was initiated by Punyasloka Panda, Vanshika Mittal, and Vanshika Shah on 12 July 2019 through conscious recognition of the need to leave behind a social footprint, and for the relationships in this fast-paced capitalist society to be symbiotic. Thus, the focus is on the upliftment of people that have so far been relegated to the sidelines, further exemplified in our motto - #helpyourhelpers. These are people that we depend on for our daily routine, but are often ignored and forced to remain in the background – such as our house help, gardener, or the office peon.

Aim + Vision

At BTS, we aim to bring these people to the fore, by attempting to eliminate the gap in opportunities, caused by unequal privilege, by implementing projects that aim to break the barriers they face one step at a time. We are working towards the inclusiveness of all units in success stories of corporates, educational institutions, and other organizations. BTS envisions a work environment that builds its foundation on equality where the needs of all the employees are catered co-equally.

What we do

We undertake several projects to empower tier four workers and laborers by attempting to educate them about topics such as financial management, health, rights, etc. To expand on these, we have created modules spanning over such essential knowledge areas. The modules are further broken down into various sub-topics to give a holistic overview of the topic. These modules are written in simple English and are self-explanatory - making them easy to implement and effectively help your helpers.

The modules are on the following topics:

1. Finance
2. Superstitions
3. Substance Abuse
4. Mobile Phone (how to use)
5. Stereotypes
6. Mental Health
7. Physical Health - including a segment about menstrual health
8. Coronavirus Special



Using the modules of menstrual health and finance which we printed out onto flashcards, we curated a BTS kit which also included a sanitary pad, self-designed accounts book and BTS badge in a cloth bag which was then put up for orders in the Ashoka University community as well as through our social media. Some of the students at Ashoka who bought these kits gifted it to the didis and bhaiyas from the housekeeping on their hostel floor while some chose to take it home for their housekeepers.

Apart from our modules, we have undertaken several projects, such as an online fundraising campaign for stranded migrant workers, in order to provide them with essentials like food and water, as well as Project Co which promotes sustainable menstrual hygiene as well as generates employment for female workers who have lost the livelihoods.

BTS - Our Logo and Name

Our logo - designed by one of our founders, Vanshika Shah - is that of someone serving you tea, which symbolizes anyone who serves you or works to make your life easier. In addition to this, tea was used to symbolize the alphabet (T) which completes the organization's abbreviation. The use of the color purple is also deliberate, as the color symbolizes labor. Coming to our name, 'Behind the Scenes' quite literally points towards the nature of our beneficiaries – as being in the background. This is the notion that we aim to dismantle through a reversal of roles, with us working behind the scenes to bring our beneficiaries into the limelight.



Contact us

We believe that it is essential for the younger generation to get into the field to create an empathetic world where everybody is treated equally. Eventually, they will be responsible for shaping a healthy work environment in the corporate industry and institutions in the future. Keeping this ideology in mind, if you want to start a project in this domain or wish to carry out our already designed project or want to collaborate with us, please reach out to us at vanshika.mittal_ug21@ashoka.edu.in or Whatsapp us at +919589706950.

Find more details about our projects on our Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/_behind_the_scenes_/

Our facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Behind-The-Scenes-111790550512766>



PRIDE MONTH

rune-midgarts



Millennials Are The 'Gayest Generation' In History
medicaldaily.com

birdshapes

we made it

rincewitch

finally a positive article about us

For memes follow @lgbtq_memes_- for you, they're absolutely hilarious



Follow @desiqueerhistory on Babur's story!

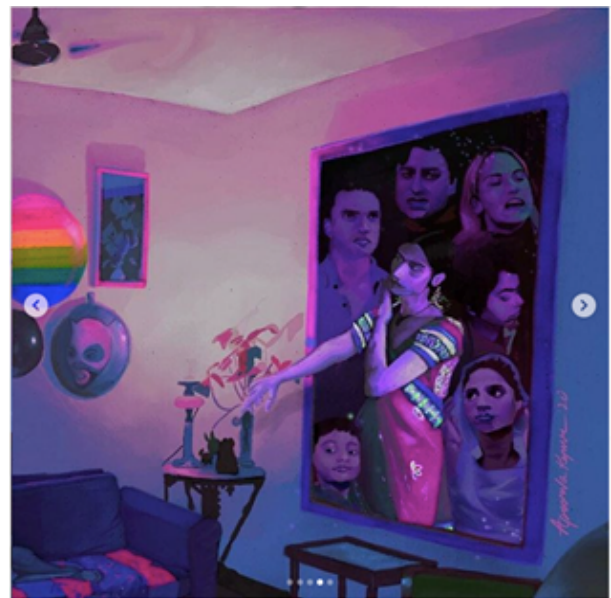
"Babur, the Turkic ruler who established the Mughal Empire in India, was bisexual."



Featuring is @lgbtq's post on a gay, black man on the day of Million Man March, Washington, D.C., October 16, 1995.



"Clothes are rebellion, as long as clothes look like they don't match your assigned gender." Follow @lgbtmumbai on more stories!



Follow @pinklistindia's post on @naz-foundation, that led to #Section377 being read down in Delhi Highcourt in 2009. Naz is an NGO working in the sectors of gender, health, and rights since 1994.



JUNE 2020

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NICKELED & DIMED

A space for young scholars to put forth their work in the form of well researched articles on issues relating to politics, law, IR, foreign policy, economics, finance and a lot more. The forum provides a wide range of perspectives which are often overlooked by mainstream media. If you wish to submit any articles, refer to the author's guidelines on <https://nickeledanddimed.com> and email your article to cnes.jgu@gmail.com

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SAMVAAD

A student run discussion forum initiated by the Centre for New Economics Studies. The forum seeks to promote active public engagement by distinguished scholars who have expertise in areas of law, economics and other social studies, present an interdisciplinary perspective.

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Being the centre's latest research platform, InfoSphere offers a space for a fact based, objective analysis on some of the most contemporary issues of economic and social policy concern in South Asia.

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Interlinked is a podcast series which focuses on topics relating globalisation. It provides valuable insights on global issues that help understand India better in its socio political climate.