OCTOBER 2020 VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3

AZAAD आवाज़

Patrika...

CNES
Centre for New Economics Studies

PAIGAM

How many times have we come across someone suffering or being harassed, felt bad for them, considered helping them, but then looked the other way and moved on. This behaviour, termed as the 'bystander effect', is a psycho-social phenomenon where humans tend to help people less based on the assumption that someone else would step in. This behavioural tendency is exacerbated when the information we consume regularly depends on commercial capital generation and changes daily to keep the viewership interested and intact.

Our initiative Azaad आवाज़ *aims to tackle an erosion of empathy in our society. This monthly magazine (Patrika) aims to focus on the marginalized sections whose voices are often muted in the cacophony of flashy mainstream media discourse. When referring to the marginalization, this platform does not aim to restrict itself to the traditional focus on social aggregates like caste and race alone but aspires to include a discussion on class, gender, sexual orientation etc.*

Azaad आवाज़ *sculpted as a digital media station focuses on issues that debilitate the "deliberately silenced", drawing no boundaries and aspires to evolve and voice the needs of those silenced. The main theme focused for this monthly edition is :* ***"Religious Erasure- Past, Present, and the Likely Future...".*** *This edition provides an in-depth perspective on the underlying issues and helps us understand the voices of those affected.*

This month's focus is on **"Religious Erasure; Past, Present and the Likely Future"**. In this Issue, we discuss and highlight different aspects of a slow erosion of culture and identity, especially of communities belonging to minority religions in our county. Erasure of religious identities is something that isn't novel or restricted to this past decade, it's a dark legacy that the Indian people have carried with them across different centuries, governments and generations. Religion, for millennia, has been used as a tool to cement the annexation of power in the Indian subcontinent. Even during the birth of our country, faith was weaponised to mark territories and draw boundaries in the sub-continent; this exercise in turn led to the biggest mass migration in the history of human-kind in 1947.

The religious polarisation in India can be traced back to several centuries, be it the pre-colonial conquests the kingdoms within the subcontinent witnessed, or the cementing of formal religious demarcations by the British through the census. Policies such as these resulted in the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, and the creation of states based on religion. Modern India too, has been subjected to discrimination and conflict on the basis of religion. Despite being a secular state, as explicitly stated in its constitution, the country sees religious minorities fall behind in the socio-economic as well as political spheres.

It is clear in so many other instances across the nation, in coerced conversion of a whole subsect of lower caste communities, in the renaming of cities and destruction of monuments of faith, in the practices commonly employed in political campaigns, and in the narratives of survivors of our darkest moments as a nation. Decisions such as the renaming of cities, as done in the case of Allahabad to Prayagraj, has many believing that their historical and religious identities are being erased. Such themes of identity and political decision making and their trickle-down effects are looked at within the Patrika, in an attempt to deconstruct the motivation behind such decisions.

The polarizability of Indian people combined with electoral politics has time and again led to minority targeted mass violence in the form of pogroms and riots. Such conflicts may be explicit and physical as seen in the recent instances of systemic violence in North-West Delhi in light of the protests around the Citizenship Amendment Act, which demands proof of residency and religious documentation, and "questions the legitimacy of Muslims' Indian citizenship and perpetuates the further marginalisation of this faith community."

In addition to being subject to such explicit violent confrontations and discriminatory policies, religious groups which comprise a minority within India face several issues in the social, political, and economic spheres. Despite the creation of reservations as a means of affirmative action as well as free primary education, students belonging to minority religious groups are subject to discrimination, from their own classmates, and well as their teachers. As per the Sachar Committee Report, only 50 per cent Muslims who finish middle school complete secondary education, compared to 62 per cent at the national level. This Commission concluded that the "socio-economic condition of most Muslims was as bad as that of the Dalits, who are at the bottom rung of the Hindu-caste hierarchy, also referred to as the 'untouchables'. Despite claiming to be a secular state, individuals are treated as second-class citizens on the basis of religion.

In this *Patrika*, we turn a critical gaze at this fundamental flaw in the Indian fabric and provide a much-needed insight into our future along with historical contexts from our past, all to make sense of the current political climate in our country.

Awaaz-In-Focus with Dr. Laurence Gautier, a political historian, provides a historical background to the recent, controversial discourse on citizenship and its development in India.

For this month *Samvaad* tackles the multi-faceted complex issue of conversions and issues within the minority community. Dr. Sanal Mohan, author of *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala,* delves into the problems and marginalisation faced by Dalit Christian communities in Kerala. The Second *Samvaad* dialogue with Professor Rowena Robinson, Professor at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT-B, discusses the issues of religious minority rights and constitutionalism.

Nazariya comprises of two sections, with an article by Dr. Aqsa Agha, currently teaching history at Delhi University and is consulting with Partners in Change, looking at a historical understanding of the role women have played in religious protests within India. *Nazariya* further follows the journey of a 16th century monument as it changes from a mosque to a mandir and deconstructs the motivations behind such moves and their consequences.

Paigam-e-Awaaz delves into the role of organised religion and the link it has with freedom and leadership in India, and the impact of religious pogroms.

This Issue's podcast, *Vichaar,* features Mr. Vikas Pathak, author and former journalist. This podcast comprises of an interesting conversation about the larger politics of name changing, from roads in the capital to cities and museums with Mughal heritage and the larger political forces behind such moves.

Finally, *Talkpoint* captures real-life narratives, haunting anecdotes from survivors of the Partition and the 1984 Sikh pogrom. These tales act as lessons from history that form a basis for further introspection for the present.

The Politicisation of Organised Religion and Freedom.

This session of JanPaigam explored the link between faith and freedom within India. The discussion was conducted by Ms. Akriti Bhatia, Founder and Director of PAIGAM, and Dr. Valson Thampu, an author, scholar, and the former Principal of St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. Throughout the discussion, discourses around historical and the current politicised aspects of faith and religion in India were explored. The impact of external rule and colonisation along with the nature secularism practiced within the state were discussed. Building on this issue, the politics of populism and nationalism and the interlinking of freedom and religious identity was traced, by looking at the role of Gandhi, and his concepts of ahimsa and truth.

Ms. Bhatia began the discussion by raising vital questions with regards to the freedom celebrated within India, the shift in the ideas of this freedom and the role of faith. She posed questions on the different natures of oppression individuals and communities continue to fight against, in order to obtain freedom within the country. Here, oppression was identified as socio-economic and political disadvantages and discrimination faced on the basis of a religious identity. Dr. Valson responds by stating that in order to understand the current freedoms enjoyed within India, one needs to consider the freedoms we lost. Here, he refers to how the Indian subcontinent was constantly subjected to external rule, either being conquered, or colonised. It is through this subjugation that India came to realise that *"freedom is endangered by vested interest"*, wherein economic and financial gains of others are prioritised over human rights and development. Post- independence, Dr. Valson believes that despite being an independent sovereign state, *"having the reins in our hands"*, freedom for all is still not guaranteed within India.

Looking back at the independence struggle and the Partition of 1947, Dr. Valson remarked that the secular nature of India began being questioned during that time, and now even more so with the rise of majoritarianism. He builds upon his understanding of majoritarianism, stating that it is a *"negative force which arises when our humanity is atrophied"*. Majoritarianism, according to him, comes about when *"the substance of our togetherness, human solidarity, kinship, brotherhood, and commitment to one another disappear"*. Both spirituality and the lack of resistance play a vital role in the rise of such a phenomenon. Freedom, Dr. Valson said *"fundamentally spiritual, and should be nourished by spiritual values and a sense of equality for all"*.

With regards to politics, Dr. Valson believes that there is a *"near complete vacuum of opposition space in India"*. The combination of the two aforementioned factors have led to such an environment, wherein each individual is responsible for its rise. With regards to faith and freedom, Ms. Bhatia and Dr. Valson looked at the rise in the role of organized religion and majoritarianism. According to Dr. Valson, *"religion is fundamentally irreconcilable with freedom"*. To him, the function of truth is to create a general context which can be shared with all people, meant to unify people, whereas falsehood causes divisions. Here, when freedom becomes detached from truth, it gets linked to other forms of raw power, to establish some sort of hegemony.

Dr. Valson stressed that there are two things present at the same time in all society, essentially that when commitment and truth are diluted and abandoned, *"the taste for and faith in violence increases"*. Here, organised religion acts as a means for the powerless to feel powerful, creating a sense of self-affirmation.

When linking the rise of religious majoritarianism, Dr. Valson emphasised that the rhetoric and political charade built around religious events and holy sites was problematic. With regards to majoritarianism and religious dominance, Dr. Valson said that the rhetoric and political charade made around events based on faith and religion are just as, if not more, important than the actual events. The rise of such majoritarianism comes about over a period of time. Dr. Valson remarked, *"If people do not wake up to this reality, there will be no remedy, and the situation will keep worsening. Change requires awareness to develop, the only way out of that is to go back to the foundations we have abandoned and rebuild ourselves as a democratic culture"*.

Dr. Valson emphasised that all sense of unity has been displaced and the stage for such an atmosphere was set up by not only one party but by all the religions, parties, and sections of society. He stated that nationalism and patriotism should be looked at with two different lenses. In theory patriotism is the love for one's country, however, it also means that one needs to understand the concept of a country, which differs from person to person.

The values in the preamble only apply in the context of the citizens, however, the idea of 'a citizen' no longer exists. It has been substituted with "*my people versus your people*". According to Dr. Valson, when a political model changes another one comes in its place, causing a shift in the activities and priorities of the state and of individuals. The effectiveness is only witnessed when the new paradigm is practiced faithfully and violently. The only way to redeem the situation is by creating public awareness about whether or not we have the *"mentality for freedom"*. He believes that majoritarianism comes from the memory of slavery, so it is vital for people to understand the mentality of freedom to become receptive to it. Dr. Valson said that it takes a lot of character strength and energy for an individual to stick to his/her values and face the consequences. He believes that it is crucial to radically educate the public. For democracy to thrive it is important to have a strong opposition, which is not present at this moment.

Society has become stagnant and now exists in a vacuum. Such a state only develops when there is a loss of dynamism in people's perspectives and ideas. This can be dealt with only by restoring dialogue and cross-border interaction Dr. Valson said, but since the rise of socialism, we have seen a decline in such practices, which in turn has made society an inert object rather than a subject.

A Pogrom in Making and its Aftermath.

With the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) in December 2019 by the government and its linking with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Muslims of the country were gripped by fear, uncertainty and a deep sense of alienation. There were peaceful protests organised across the different parts of the country, including the national capital. The situation turned grim on 24th February 2020 when the streets of North-East Delhi were struck with violence and terror as a mob of Hindu nationalists – who stood in support of the CAA-NRC- attacked Muslim neighbourhoods. The pogrom that ensued lasted for several days and claimed over 50 lives with complete absence of state intervention in controlling the rioting mobs. This was a targeted attack on the community as their shops, homes and few mosques were burnt down with thousands of them being displaced.

Pari and Hamza, a middle-aged couple have lost everything they owned as a result of the February pogrom. The mob that entered their lane, broke into their house, looted all their belongings, and then set their house on fire. While trying to escape, they were attacked on the streets by rioters with iron rods and stones. Pari got saved but her son and relatives were injured.

It has been seven months since this incident occurred but there has been no respite for the victims. While the memories of violence are fresh, there are no signs of restoring normalcy in their lives. Pari burst into tears while speaking to the scribe about the darkness the riots brought to their lives. Their house needs to be rebuilt from scratch, but they don't have the means to pay for its full construction. Hamza was an egg-seller but has been unable to run his business because of a *"shift in people's attitude"*, as he puts it, since the pogrom. The ongoing pandemic and the following lockdown imposed in March this year further pushed Hamza and his business to the edges. The pogrom cleaved divisions in the society to an extent that neighbourhood businesses were communalised. *"Somehow the non-Muslims who employed me before the riots do not want services from me anymore, they get it done from their own community members"*, he exclaimed.

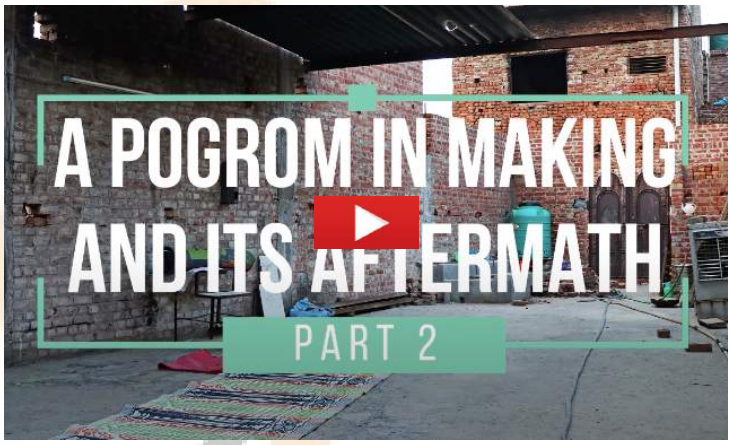
They are currently living in a rented flat that costs them Rs. 3000 each month, which they are finding difficult to afford. They don't have a home or a job nor any money to buy food. *"We'll either get a heart attack or die. That is all that can happen without a roof over our heads."* They have received no assistance or relief from the government or any organisation to rebuild their lives. While there are government funds that have been allocated and distributed to families affected by the pogrom, Hamza and Pari have gotten no access to a penny. *"You can look at my bank accounts, I haven't been given any money from anyone to build my house apart from Rs 5000 and some other stuff"*, she said with tears in her eyes.

With the absence of the state, it is the civil society that took up the responsibility of rebuilding lives of the people who suffered in this grotesque display of hate.

The attackers, by destroying the houses, looting all their belongings, and disrupting their livelihood, have pushed the community deeper into poverty. The lack of government assistance in the aftermath of what were the Capital's most brutal events of violence that took place in decades has deepened their feeling of fear and doom. This begs us to ask who is responsible for helping them get back on their feet after everything they had was taken away from them. As Pari sits on the unfinished floor of the construction site of her roofless house describing her helplessness, she says, *"All I'm asking for is help to rebuild my house. The rest we will earn on our own."* Whose job is it to do so?

The psychological trauma that the pogrom and the state's apathy has brought to its victims is incalculable and may last for generations. It then becomes the duty of the state to compensate the victims for their monetary losses so they can restart their lives and stand on their own feet.

A Pogrom in Making and its Aftermath.



The terror caused by the Pogrom in February has been one of the most violent communal riots that Delhi has seen after Partition.

Each attack that took place during those days was of the same nature and followed a set pattern. In every Muslim neighbourhood that was attacked, the houses were broken into and looted. Shops and cars, and local Mosques were set on fire. Any Muslim seen on the streets was targeted and attacked.

Mohammed Hassan and his wife were at home on 25th February, hoping for a quiet night in, when they heard loud noises on the street. A hoard of people stormed across, smashing cars, setting mosques on fire, and burning down houses. At 8 pm they came to Hassan's house. They broke down their door and burnt their car. The family had locked themselves inside but the mob found a way in. Their home was attacked, looted, and destroyed. Hassan's wife recalls how the attackers entered and looted their belongings, picking up everything that was valuable. *"They took my jewellery, our hard-earned money, and they took our clothes as well. They didn't even spare our children's clothes".*

Hassan and his wife were beaten black and blue. The chants and slogans of their attackers were louder than their screams and cries for mercy. The police arrived to their rescue fifteen minutes after they were called. "*We are thankful to the police. They saved our lives. We could've been killed",* Hassan recalled.

While Hassan's case is an exception in terms of receiving Police help, there was complete Police inaction during the Delhi pogrom. In fact, there were reports that the police participated in violence attacking Muslim neighbourhoods, while chanting "Jai Shree Ram!" along with the armed Hindu mob. The international media reported about the partisan behaviour of the Delhi police that chose to *"look away"* in abetting the rioters.

As Hassan stood, holding up pictures of their ransacked house, the idea of justice seems very far-fetched to him and many more like him who have been victims of communal riots. It has been seven months since Hassan's house was destroyed and looted. He was stripped of all his belongings and savings which he acquired after years of hard work and there was nothing left to rebuild. Despite this, all he and his wife ask for is assistance to *"get back on their feet".*

Since then they have not been able to sustain themselves. The van that Hassan owned for his egg selling business was burnt and destroyed. The lockdown posed further challenges, making acquiring daily meals a challenge. They have been fortunate enough to receive help from an NGO, however, there has still been no action from the side of the state. Neither to provide justice to Hassan and his family, nor to support them for their basic survival.

Erasure of Religious Minorities in India: Demolishment of Monuments and the Renaming of Cities.

Access the Podcast:

In this podcast, Mr. Pathak takes us on a tour of India's history and sheds light on those aspects of history that have been ignored over the past decades. Mr. Vikas Pathak is a former journalist at the Hindu, Hindustan Times, Asiaville, etc, and the author of the book *Contesting Nationalisms*. His deep understanding of Indian history helped find reasonings for the current socio-political changes with regards to the recent renaming and demolishment of particular sites across India.

The current renaming and demolishment of structures in India stem from the partial reading of history where the narrative of 'Mughal Emperors being the oppressors of India' is attempted to be propagated. This narrative is used to disseminate Hindu ideologies and "liberate" India from its sour memories of the oppressive Muslim invaders. The podcast not only points out the flaws in this sort of propaganda but also provides logical arguments against it.

Furthermore, while demolishment, vandalism, and renaming is a trend India has seen over centuries, the implications of those have changed over time. In this podcast, Mr. Pathak makes a clear distinction between the events in history with the current events and points out how the values between eras have changed and a clear analysis can only be made when cultures, values, and beliefs of that particular era are taken into account.

The podcast concludes by drawing a unique relationship between demolishment and renaming and tourism. Being a part of the international arena, the paradox between the way India's current leaders want to portray India and the world's perception of India is a very interesting analogy to draw. The role of this paradox in demolishment and renaming is quite intriguing.

Mr. Vikas Pathak
Author of "Contesting Nationalisms".

"Mughals are the heroes of India, the martyrs of 1857 have already declared that. It is just that we don't read their answers."

The Women Bhaktas in Indian History: Subverting Gender Roles?

How wrongly protests, as expression of rage and associated only with men, becomes evident when one looks at the lives of women in Indian history. Can protest be non- 'masculine' in an otherwise patriarchal world? The answer is, yes. Indian history is replete with such examples. More recently, the anti-CAA peaceful protests led by the women of Shaheen Bagh, demanding their rights as citizens of this country, challenged many stereotypes and brought out this essence of protest as non- 'masculine' and a marker of historical continuity of resistance displayed by women. Delving deep into history brings us to a period that saw the phenomenon of protest by women strongest.

The emergence of Bhakti movement in early medieval South India, by Alvaras-the devotees of Lord Vishnu and Nayanars-devotees of Shiva, which gradually spread across the country between sixth to the seventeenth century, signified a revolution, characterised by the rise of anti-caste leaders, sudra and women saints. It aimed to cultivate religious reforms by pursuing devotion to achieve salvation. The very emergence of women in religious spaces heavily controlled by men is a show of protest because they were defying the roles ascribed for women. This acquires specific importance in the face of Brahmanical structure of the state and society that hitherto limited salvation only for the men belonging to the 'pure' upper caste. Most of these devotional venerations that emerged during the early medieval were unorthodox and represented an inner social tumult that challenged and discarded the prevalent Brahmanical ritual purity, monopoly and hierarchy. The trespassing trend continued to emerge and with every passing century it spread from South to the North of India. Starting with Tamils in the 6th century, it was propounded in Karnataka by the Virashaivas (12th century), then, Varharis and Manibharis in Maharashtra (12th to 17th). Later, in the 14th, 15th and 16th century the trend moved to Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Bengal and Kashmir (Paniker, 1997).

Not only the emergence but also the way the women Bhaktas emerged deserves due recognition because that process was possible only when they transgressed the social rules especially related to sexuality. The emergence of women saints took place in the context of the bhakti or devotional movements that characterized the medieval age in India. Given a patriarchal social set-up which denied freedom to women, spirituality provided the only means of self-expression. By composing poetry in the religious languages to address the people in languages they could understand, thus breaking the clutches of Sanskrit, the life of women saints was a challenge to Brahmanism and patriarchy. The 6th century Tamil women poet-saint, Ammaiyar, initiated the women Bhakti tradition, creating a space for women to open up. This led to the establishment of a long line of women poets. (Ramaswamy, 2002).

How revolutionary was their self-assertion as saints is evident from the fact that the prevalent Brahmanical culture placed women mainly as mothers of sons- the birth of a son was important because performance of last rituals only by the son brought salvation to the parents in their afterlife. To quote Manu, *"The production of children, the nurture of those born, and the daily life of men, of these matters the wife is visibly the cause. Offspring, faithful service and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and for oneself depend on the wife alone."* From the earliest historical times, Dharmashastras and the Smritis, especially Manusmriti, commanded 'purity' and submission from women to the men, be it father or husband. In this context, the contestation by women for their individual salvation, through devotion, was no small a feat.

Dr. Aqsa Agha.
(Ph.D, JNU) teaches history at Delhi University.

Another important aspect of this display of spirituality by women was the way they articulated and practiced it. The very moment of transitioning into a woman bhakta was an act of radical dissent by these women saints. But why was it radical? Any understanding of what the women saints stood against is incomplete without the knowledge of the evolution and nature of prevalent brahmanical patriarchal structure. The process of establishing control over women's sexuality in a highly stratified and closed Brahmanical structure could be useful in analysing this.

Control over women's sexuality became more pronounced with the shift to an agricultural economy and the second urbanisation (800BC- 600BC) was marked by the emergence of caste and class divisions. The emergence of a fairly stratified society and the collapse of tribal economy and polity in the post-Vedic period, especially with the establishment of private control over land, held and transmitted within a patrilineal system, accompanied by the beginning also of patrilineal succession to kingship, and the preservation of caste purity meant that the sexual behaviour of certain categories of women needed to be closely guarded. (Chakravarti, 1993). The impression that women's essential nature lies in their sexuality was most blatantly emphasised by Manu, the most prominent ideologue of

the brahmanical system. By carefully guarding the wife (the most important category of women as far as the brahman ideologues were concerned) a man preserves the parity of his offspring, his family, himself, and his means of acquiring merit. (Chakravarti, 1993). The control over women was systematised and made deeply entrenched by the ideology of the stridharam, that was revived in the nineteenth century as the pativrata dharama and through internalisation made women complicit in their own subordination.

A structure that ensures treatment of women as property of castes, communities and clans, to be regulated, controlled and even punished in case of flouting the norms was the larger common sense and the sine qua non of the society. The power of the male kinsmen was defined by the distinct right to coerce wives into submission, if they violated the norms established for them. Immolation or sati had prescriptive metaphor of wifely devotion to husband, family and the kul (Hardgrove 1999).

The context in the medieval period was no different; in the sense that patriarchy continued and strengthened with newer forms of control. Along with this structural constraint, two medieval customs reinforced and strengthened the subjugation of women. One was purdah or the veiling of women which was common among the upper-class Hindus and Rajputs, in particular in the north, while in the south respectable women rarely stepped outside the bounds of their home. (Ramasamy, 2002) The other being the practice of mounting the funeral pyre of one's husband, glorified by the name of sati. (So deeply internalised is the idea of sacrifice for a woman, that in the nineteenth century Pativrata Dharam embodied sacrifice or self-destructive feminity, was preferred by a society, in its pursuit for rationalising abolition of sati).

The gravity of the context that reflects the continued history of patriarchy, each of these individuals and their efforts are commendable. The spiritual path helped women to break out of all stereotypes. As a saint, she made the unimaginable and condemned, a lived reality. They sought God whether as a naked saint (Akka Mahadevi) or as a skeletal being or demoness (Karaikkal Ammaiyar). Mirabai, a childless woman (widowed or separated) who is identified in the popular imagination as having rebelled against husband and in-laws, is seen as a saint, as a mystic, as a fervent devotee of Krishna, as an anguished virahini, as one who gave up the world for god, and also as a rebel (Vanita, 1992). Mira was one of the only saints in north India who rebelled against injustice within the family and kinship group, emphasising that the injustice was done to her because she was a woman. Many of Mira's compositions reflect the ill-treatment by the Rana of Mewar, her mother-in-law, and her sister-in-law.

That these women lived on their terms, which are different from socially given terms- and yet being written in the history- shows the importance of their existence as a site of protest. That it happened and that it could not be forgotten and that it was not forgiven! Their story exists ‘for their own significance’ and children are not taught to become like them; but children learn from their lives that if one is unfairly treated, the women can rebel!

In a society with its moral compass too obsessed with a woman’s sexuality, viewed women either as a chaste wife or a prostitute, Mira, was a rebel, like many other bhaktas, who postulated her god as a husband and also as a lover, even an adulterous lover. Akka Mahãdêvi went naked with her body covered only by her long lustrous hair, an act too radical for the times she was living. Some were condemned as diwani by their contemporaries for challenging the status quo. There has been the criticism that the women saints imagined their relationship with God in a marital framework, which essentially reinforces patriarchy and a power equation that disadvantages women. The holders of this view forget the context and the question of agency exercised by the women saints. That in this moralistic framework they carved out a space for dissent is an important contribution of these women.But for them, the society would be without hope. The very act of living by women saints on their own terms, which was non-conformative, was an act of unimaginable courage and resistance.

Author bio: Aqsa Agha (Ph.D, JNU) teaches history at Delhi University and is consulting with Partners in Change, New Delhi. She has worked extensively on issues of human trafficking (TISS, Mumbai) and on human rights violation with different organisations. She has previously worked with Centre for Equity Studies where she was engaged in training grassroot communities.

From Mosques to Mandirs.

This article is based on a visit to the Badi Masjid in Sonepat, Haryana in 2019.

Sonepat; Architecture is the cornerstone of civilization, a culmination of infrastructure and society. There are stories written in the stylistic construction of buildings, history running through the walls and arches of monuments that we see today. That is precisely the charm of monuments; there's a beauty in what old ruins of a building reveal, something so alluring about the story they might tell. Often sites of such cultural importance aren't just icons of distant historic past but also of raw memories that are still actively shaping our present. The mosques, mandirs, tombs and dargahs are *"icons of the alive and raw memories of the subcontinent's partition in 1947 along with Hindu and Muslim identities"* (Patel). A few examples of such locations are the 16th century mosque in Ayodhya called Babri Masjid or the 12th century Qutbi complex. One such lesser known building in Sonepat is the Durga Mandir, famously known as the Badi Masjid, which was converted into a temple right after Independence.

The Partition of 1947 was a result of a heightened communal politics based on religious assertions by different communities. Religion was the tool that marked and defined territories of Muslim Pakistan and Hindu-dominated India. During partition, there was a major change in the demography of the state of Punjab, later divided into Haryana and Punjab. There was an influx of Hindu families into present-day Haryana, and an outflow of the Muslim population. The area where the erstwhile Badi Masjid is located in was predominantly Muslim. After Partition, the caretaker of the Masjid recounts barely 7 Muslim families chose to stay back, changing the dynamics of the area completely.

Just opposite to the Badi Masjid is a modern looking, sleek office building that had large glass windows. The name of the building, written in bold metallic figures on the top of the building, was Dharam Tower. The irony was that the 'D' of the metallic name board had fallen off, leaving behind the word Haram. In Hinduism, dharam refers to acts a person must do as their religious and moral duty whereas haram is an Islamic jurisprudence used to refer to any act that is forbidden. This was an interesting point of view to look at the oddity that is the temple/mosque. Could one man's religious duty be oppression of the others'?

The caretaker of the present day Durga Mandir says when they arrived here from Lahore, they needed a place to pray. This was an abandoned mosque and hence they took it and used it as their sacred space for worship. In his retelling of the chain of events that caused the conversion of this structure, he used the term kabza indicating a forceful sequestration of the monument. The use of the word kabza revealed that this may not have been what truly happened at the mosque in 1947. Details about the construction and establishment of the building were very revealing in the motivations of new inhabitants of the mosque. The fact that the upper levels of the temple were

Exterior, Badi Masjid/ Durga Mandir, Sonepat, Haryana.

air-conditioned modern rooms used to rent out to various wedding parties for monetary purposes which is not a traditional practice in most Hindu temples. These facts indicate that maybe the motivations behind the annexation of this building cannot only be attributed to religious sentiment.

The old caretaker spoke about the renovations they had done with pride and a sense of achievement. He thought this to be the true factor that consolidated their presence in the area, that removed their refugee status and gave them a sense of belonging. Additionally, there were many instances of violence, in and around the mosque that further indicate a possible violent confiscation of the building. Some of these conflicts were also included in the narrative of the caretaker of the history of the building.

He spoke about how two young men were employed to live in the Mandir to care of it, and how one faithful night they had to flee for their life as a mob of angry Muslim protestors arrived to retake the ownership of the structure. Further, the extensive and long case fought over the ownership of the structure also shows that there were perhaps instances of conflict and possible violence during the confiscation of Badi Masjid.

Sonepat, initially, was a bustling hub of diversity, a real melting pot of people with different faiths and religions. The demography was drastically changed after the Partition. Census data from 1901 (according to theThe Delhi District Gazetteer, The State of Punjab, 1901 accessed from the National Archive, New Delhi) show that Sonepat had a rich and diverse population including Christians, Hindus of various castes and a significant Muslim population.

Exterior, Badi Masjid/ Durga Mandir, Sonepat, Haryana.

Gazetteers from post-independence show that these areas are dominantly Hindu now, severely lacking any kind of diversity. During partition, large numbers of Muslims relocated to the newly formed nation-state of Pakistan. On the other hand, there was also an influx of Hindu and Sikh communities that migrated from Pakistan to India.

On asking the old caretaker about migrating to Sonepat and the experience of the partition, he explained that he was originally a resident of Lahore. During the migration, he witnessed haunting experiences at the hands of the enraged Muslim mob as did they at the hands of the Hindu mobs. Murder, rape and theft were the experiences of the migrated communities that settled in parts of the then Eastern Punjab. This changed the collective memory of residents of the entire region, more broadly it has come to stand for their opinion of an entire subsect of Indian society. This gave rise to the Hindutva ideology that is dominant in the country today.

In the 2014 elections in Sonepat, the Bharatiya Janata Party won with an astounding margin of 20.3%. The BJP is infamous for campaigning on the basis of religious ideology and is closely associated with the notion of Hindutva, that promises to 'deal' with the 'threat' Muslims pose (Aloysius). Much of the legal struggle that has plagued the building and its management, has been successfully overcome by the administration in the form of huge donations by MLAs, political support and community backing.

This has been instrumental in the establishment of the Mandir which was formally done in 2005. The fact that even during when the majority of active voters in the area are now second to third generation of the refugees that settled here, it is evident that the pointers of BJP campaigning still appeal to the local masses on the deeply engraved collective memory of the partition. It shows how the remnants of partition experience are still alive in the tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility but also in the oppressive ideals that are passed down the generations. This phenomenon is integral in explaining the socio-political fabric of our country.

"It shows how the remnants of partition experience are still alive in the tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility but also in the oppressive ideals that are passed down the generations."

Thus, what happened at the Badi Masjid is not just one isolated incident. Hundreds of religious sites, post-independence, have been subjected to sequestration and conversion to fit the majoritarian religion. The biggest example of this can be seen in the verdict of the Supreme Court in the Case of the Ayodhya Dispute. We see this sort of asserting of territory even in the renaming of historic cities like Allahabad and the saffronisation of history. The polarisation of Indians today combined with exploitative electoral politics has been detrimental to the pluralistic cultural heritage, which is gradually washing away the very fundamental sentiment/idea of being Indian - unity in diversity.

Citizenship : From Civic Agency to Religious Statism.

In conversation with Dr. Laurence Gautier.

Q1) How did the concept of citizenship emerge?

If you look at global history, not just Indian history, you will see that we often trace the idea of citizenship back to Ancient Greece, that's the 5th or the 6th century BC. Of course when you hear the word citizenship, the word you also hear is the word “city”. The idea of citizenship is primarily built around life in the city. The idea is that politically active residents of the city are citizens - this guarantees some political rights- like the right to participate and present yourself in elections, the right to vote, but also includes the guarantees of certain legal rights- for example the freedom to expression along with many other freedoms.

Q2) How did we move from subjects to citizens? What did this transition hope to accomplish? In the Indian concept, how did the concept of citizenship materialize?

Now if you look at the Indian context, of course the move from subjecthood to citizenship happened with Independence and it's important to remember this context for two reasons - one, because the idea of citizenship is deeply connected with the ideas of emancipation, freedom, no more subjection to another (colonial) power. Citizenship was to bring about liberation and empowerment, the power to become an agent of political right. Second, with the rise of citizenship in India, one highly debated issue that came up was: on what basis should citizenship be awarded?

There were two conceptions of citizenship, one based on *Jus sanguinis*: Should it be awarded on the basis of descent, if your parents were Indian, and as their children you are entitled to Indian citizenship? Or should it be based on *Jus soli* , i.e. should it based on whether or not an individual was born in India. There was no consensus about this in 1947, and the debate carried on for a few years. It was only in 1955 that the Citizenship Act was finally adopted. So for a good few years there was confusion about who was a citizen and who was not. This also happened to be a time of mass migration, in fact the biggest migration recorded in human history with the Partition, so who belonged to what territory was really unclear.

"Citizenship was to bring about liberation and empowerment, the power to become an agent of political right. "

Dr. Laurence Gautier,
Political historian.

Eventually our government settled on the right of territory, Jus soli, which means that it didn't matter what religion you belonged to, provided you were born in India, you could become a citizen. This was especially important in the context of a country which was still trying to heal from the wounds of Partition. The Congress government was trying to build a more inclusive definition of citizenship which would bring together people from different religious, cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. This made the definition of citizenship extremely important for nation-building.

While the Citizenship Act recognised all the people who lived in India as members of India’s citizenry, it also excluded all the Indian population that had migrated abroad, as indentured labour, merchants, or administrators to other British colonies. Now these people felt Indian because of their descent, their culture but were not entitled to citizenship. So the Citizenship Act of 1955 was made to be inclusive yet it also proved to be exclusive from the very beginning.

Q3) What sort of political climate was it developed in?

The confusion regarding citizenship partly arose from the fact that citizenship rules had to be fixed at a time of great political turmoil. When the British left, of course they left behind some infrastructure but it had to be divided amongst India and Pakistan. Suddenly the state had to be built anew. This was a time when the state was weak and was struggling to ensure national unity. This national unity was not a given, it had to be built. The adoption of a territory-based citizenship can be read in this light as an effort to build a sense of unity beyond and above communal differences.

Q4) The citizenship act in India, is one that has been changed over and over- Birth, Descent, Origin and Now Religion. What has inspired such radical change and amendments over the past 50 years?

We have established how and why the first basis on which citizenship was granted was Birth. However, the Citizenship Act has been amended over time. The idea of descent was incorporated in 1986, when it was stated that not only did you have to be born in India but you also needed to have at least one Indian parent in order to become an Indian citizen. So it was no longer enough to be born in the country. In 2003 there was another Amendment that stated that in addition to being born in the country, both parents should be Indian citizens or one parent should be Indian and the other should not be an illegal immigrant at the time of birth. Now this is important because when you define who should be a citizen, you also say who shouldn't become an Indian citizen. This amendment reflects a growing fear of the "other", especially in this case a fear of the illegal migrant. There is a fear that these "outsiders" would disturb the cohesion of the general citizens' body.

"This amendment reflects a growing fear of the "other", especially in this case a fear of the illegal migrant."

We see this fear pop up time and again. It was clear in this 2003 amendment and it is clear again in the more recent context. We see how the idea of citizenship based simply on birth and territory has slowly been eroded as new criteria have been introduced. That brings me to religion. The recent Citizenship Amendment Act introduces for the first time religion in the Constitution as a criterion to access citizenship, in the sense that the Act is supposed to grant an easier access to Indian citizenship for religious minorities in certain neighbouring countries when they migrate to India to avoid religious persecution. The countries mentioned are Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh - all Muslim-majority countries. Other neighbouring countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka are not mentioned. This act also explicitly mentions what groups can benefit from this provision. The only religious minority that cannot enjoy the benefits of this new act

"Eventually our government settled on the right of territory, Jus soli, which means that it didn't matter what religion you belonged to, provided you were born in India, you could become a citizen.

are Muslims (the assumption is that Muslims cannot be persecuted in Muslim-majority countries, which is a problematic assumption: Shias, for instance, can very well be persecuted in Sunni-majority countries).

This conception of citizenship based on religion or on "blood right" has actually been in debate since Independence. It is not novel or exclusive to this time. The idea that Hindus residing outside India would not be granted citizenship was and still is hard to accept in certain schools of thought. So in many ways we still live with the legacy of Partition: the debates around CAA are part of a longer debate on citizenship, one that has been ongoing since 1947.

Eventually our government settled on the right of territory, *Jus soli*, which means that it didn't matter what religion you belonged to, provided you were born in India, you could become a citizen. This was especially important in the context of a country which was still trying to heal from the wounds of Partition. The Congress government was trying to build a more inclusive definition of citizenship which would bring together people from different religious, cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. This made the definition of citizenship extremely important for nation-building.

While the Citizenship Act recognised all the people who lived in India as members of India's citizenry, it also excluded all the Indian population that had migrated abroad, as indentured labour, merchants, or administrators to other British colonies. Now these people felt Indian because of their descent, their culture but were not entitled to citizenship. So the Citizenship Act of 1955 was made to be inclusive yet it also proved to be exclusive from the very beginning.

"This conception of citizenship based on religion or on "blood right" has actually been in debate since Independence."

Caste in Christianity; Conversions and Problems Faced by Dalit Christians.

In this month's Samvaad discussion, Dr. Sanal Mohan, author of *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala*, talks about the discrimination meted out the Dalit Christians from a historical and socio- anthropological . He begins with explaining the social fabric in colonial Kerala, where upper caste Hindus and upper caste Christians have historically held repressive control over land while the Dalit Christians are suppressed as agricultural labourers.

Within this group, he looks at different caste groups such as Pulayas, Ezhavas and the Kuruvas who formed the "enslaved social group" and were denied agency. Dr. Mohan explains the oppressive relationship between the landholders and the labourers, who could be bought and sold either separately or along with the land. This led to the break in familial relations as fathers and mothers would be sold to different landlords which would separate them from their children. In this discussion, he sheds a light on the idea of "absolute right" that was afforded to the upper caste in Kerala, who had an immutable ownership of land, irrespective of the religious community they belonged to. This concentration of land in the hands of the dominant upper-caste groups was a result of the commerce and trade that flourished in the region that transcended religious communities.

Further in the conversation, Dr. Mohan stressed on the reasons that led to the permeation of the discriminatory caste system into Christian community of Kerala that were upheld as shared social values, ideas, and practices by the Upper Caste Hindus and the Upper Caste Christians. He succinctly explains *"In Christianity, spiritually, one cannot bring in Caste but that doesn't mean Christianity doesn't have caste"*. In the process, he deconstructs the idea of social spaces being created and shared amongst the dominant community.

For Dr. Mohan, religion is not just limited to its scriptures, but extends deeper into *"lived religion"*, where *"social and religious values mingle together and solidify to create what religion in actual practice is"*.

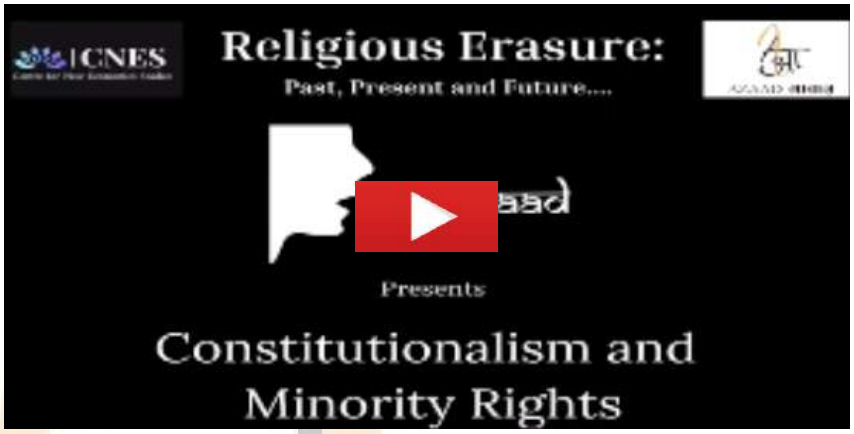
It is through the practice of lived realities that the Christians adopted the caste structure and the same discriminatory system became widespread within Christianity.

From the perspective of marginality, he critiques the developmental model undertaken by the state- the 'Kerala Model of Development'- which has, in its pursuit of providing health and education benefits to the people, has left out the marginalised groups. Dr. Mohan scathingly point out that women who come from all caste groups and religions are often ignored from the mainstream development process. Moreover, these neglected groups include individuals from the fishing community, Dalits and Adivasis. Arguing from a social citizenship framework, Dr. Mohan posits that the state must ensure dignity to each and every individual.

At a more political level and on the question of reservations for Dalit Christians, he calls the arguments put forward by the state that Christianity as a religion does not profess the caste system and thus is more egalitarian in its roots- is flawed. Citing the work of Satish Deshpande, who has extensively documented the discrimination that the Dalit Christians face, Dr. Sanal Mohan questions the intentions of the government on the question of reservation, arguing that *"it is a matter of convenience for the state."*

A firm believer of the idea of democratic understanding of the citizenship rights of the Dalit Christians, he rejects the *"baseless arguments put forward by the Indian elites"* and calls the complicit role of the upper-caste Christians in enabling their caste interests and not extending support to Dalit Christians. From the perspective of social and political citizenship, he argues for the legitimate right for reservation to the oppressed groups.

Constitutionalism and Minority Rights with Dr. Rowena Robinson



For the second part of the *Samvaad* discussion focusing on the Dalit Christians, the conversation was held with Dr. Rowena Robinson, professor at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT-B. She articulately explains the social stratification that occurred under the British during the early 20th century through the Indian Council Act of 1909 or the Morley-Minto Reforms. She concedes that despite this legislature allowing the increase of Indian participation and granting separate electorates for the Muslims, it had a lasting impact on dividing the country. According to her, *"the most important ingredient of the British rule was dividing the population on the lines of religion and caste to control more territory and people"*.

She argues that this laid the foundation of concretising the idea of 'Majority' and 'Minority'. Dr. Robinson stresses on the role of the Government of India Act of 1935 played in furthering and extending the idea of reservation and separate electorates to the other sections of the society including the Sikhs, Christians and "Other Depressed Classes". She speaks about how administratively the numerical minorities were treated as one category and were segregated from the "Depressed Classes" who were classified on the basis of their social and economic backwardness. This, she argues, provided the basis for the colonial legacy of shaping India's political, legal and administrative thinking.

Dr. Robinson also emphasised on the role of the partition in shaping the thought process of the Constituent Assembly at that time. She argues that once the *"once the shadow of the Partition fell on the Constituent Assembly, there was a pressure to compromise for the minority groups"*. She speaks about how the Christian group particularly was committed to the realisation of a secular nation and how they had to compromise giving up political representation, separate electorate and reservations. *"In return"*, she says, *"what was consolidated was Cultural and Religious Freedoms"*.

Dr. Robinson then talks about the concept of fraternity as a topic being more complex and a wider range of topics than secularism as it also has a social component apart from the political aspect. She interprets the concept of the fraternity from the point of view of the Constituent Assembly. Firstly, she states that the Constituent Assembly constructed the principle of fraternity keeping in mind the Indian society. According to the Constituent Assembly, the idea of the fraternity was intrinsically connected to the fundamental rights granted by the Constitution of India. Fraternity as a concept is not something that united the nation, however, the unity of the nation was founded on the idea of the dignity of an individual. Only when people have the same level of dignity that they can form a democratic nation.

She also states that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the biggest supporter of the concept of fraternity and he brought up the idea in the Assembly. The idea of the fraternity was earlier not given as much importance unlike discrimination, however, after recent judicial judgments, it has been brought to light.

Dr. Robinson also casts a light on the various atrocities that the Dalits face, including those who are Christians. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, provides protection against violence and atrocities. However, this Act only protects those who are listed which do not include Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. According to her however, in a society like India, the state policies should be advanced. She believes that for social advancement there needs to be open dialogue and communication, and the concern of all the sections of society should be heard. If the state falters then there is no hope for social transformation. The state needs to be in advance of social prejudices and social discrimination.

1947 & 1984 - Anecdotes from India's Darkest Moments in History

Talkpoint captures real-life narratives, haunting anecdotes from survivors of the Partition of 1947, and the 1984 Sikh pogrom. These tales act as lessons from history that form a basis for further introspection for the present.

At the time when we had to move across the border and flee Rawalpindi, I was only 6 years old. So I don't remember much but there are still a couple of things etched in my memory. I distinctly remember my parents panicking because we were on the verge of missing what turned out to be the last train that crossed the border without being hit by people who had started killing those commuting to the other side. Another thing that stands out to me was that even though there was so much chaos and so many people were trying to get their families safely to the other side of the border. There was pin drop silence in the Lahore station because no one wanted to spook the Nawabs and Mohammedans who had taken up the responsibility of killing the remaining Hindus in Rawalpindi. During the days leading up to us having to move, things had gotten really out of hand. Everyone knew what was coming and it came to a point where even looking out from our window which faced the road at night could potentially put our family in danger.

The violence erupted was actually sown by the British. During India's partition, it wasn't just about the territorial boundaries. It was more about the displacement of people from one side of the border to the other, which led to the violence. Had the people on either side be allowed to live there after the territorial lines were drawn, then maybe the amount of violence could have been mitigated.

Overall, the partition was a bad experience for me and my family. After we moved to India, we lived in a room without any basic amenities for almost 11-12 years. My father was unable to set-up and establish a bookstore in India, similar to the one we had in Rawalpindi. There was another book store right next to ours, which somehow got all the business and it was difficult for us to even earn Rs. 2-3 per day as well. The only reason we were able to sustain ourselves was that my Mother's family was in India prior to the Partition and agreed to help us out. Education, friends, going to play and other things that were easily available to us in Rawalpindi soon became distant dreams after we moved across the border. My father passed away soon after we came to India and the burden to earn for the house came down to me and my brother at the ages of 15 and 19 respectively. It's been a very hard road from that time to now, but even when I look back at it now it brings back bad memories and experiences that I try to block out.

Mr. Surinder Nath Malhotra narrates his experience of the Partition.

1947 & 1984 - Anecdotes from India's Darkest Moments in History

Talkpoint captures real-life narratives, haunting anecdotes from survivors of the Partition of 1947, and the 1984 Sikh pogrom. These tales act as lessons from history that form a basis for further introspection for the present.

Mr. Kamaljit Singh narrates his experience of the Sikh Massacre.

It was a very painful experience for me. I remember that back then I was working with Western Electronics limited in the Okhla Industrial Enclave in New Delhi. I came to know about the incident around noon that day that Indira Gandhi had been assassinated. What followed immediately after that will be etched in my memory forever. After my factory closed, like every other day, I took the local transport to go back to my home. When we neared Safdarjung, a group of people who had organised themselves from the nearby village, stopped the bus. They wanted to hurt all the Sikh people in the bus. They proceeded to take off my turban and started pelting stones at us. I somehow managed to run off to the basement of the nearby Hyatt Regency hotel and made sure that I hid there for one whole night. I still remember the noise of the chaos that erupted in the nearby roads; the burning of the cars and tyres by this angry mob. Violence had erupted on the street.

The next day, the hotel people asked us to vacate the premises as some people had to come to know that some of us were hiding in the basement. On November 1st, we shifted to Hotel Ashoka, near the Embassy Road. During the transit, people who were dressed as police came near us and started hitting us with their rifle butts. I got hit and fell unconscious. Luckily a lady police officer from the Delhi Police came off to give shelter to us. The mob was running wild. They wanted to put all the unconscious people into one van and blow off the van! But thanks to that lady officer, who I later came to know was Kiran Bedi, she took all the injured/ unconscious people to the Ram Lohia Hospital. I regained consciousness 10 hours later and woke up with 48 stitches to my head.

My family on the other hand was worried sick as I hadn't returned home for a few days. On 31st October, my brother left in search of me and travelled to my aunt's house near Jangpura extension and he came safe. My sister and mother, who stayed at home, were luckily rescued by the army and transported to an army shelter. Later we came to know that the mob had burnt our houses in Palam Colony and nothing was left. After 16 days, I was reunited with my family. Punishing the entire community for the crimes committed by one or two members of the community is totally unlawful! I pray that it should never happen in the future.

Ada Nagar
Ada is a Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

Ashita Singh
Ashita is a Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

Manya Sachdev
Manya is a Research Analyst and has created the illustrations on the title page and on page one.

Natasha Yadav
Natasha is a Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

Sahil Philip
Sahil is a Senior Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

Shrrijiet Roychowdhary
Shrrijiet is a Senior Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

Vanshika Shah
Vanshika is a Research Analyst at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

ADVISORY BOARD

Ms. Akriti Bhatia
Founder & Sahabhagi of PAIGAM.

Mr. Aditya Vardhan Singh Choudhary
Co-Founder & Sahabhagi: Media Technologies of PAIGAM.

Prof. (Dr.) Ambreen Agha
Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs.

Prof. (Dr.) Lipika Kamra
Assistant Professor, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities.

Prof. Nisha Nair
Assistant Professor, Jindal Global Law School.

Prof. (Dr.) Sweta Sen
Assistant Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs.

Prof. (Dr.) Zaheer Abbas
Assistant Professor, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities.