

Nickeled and Dimed



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PUTTING A PRICE ON NATURE, WITH A TWIST

By Krishanu Kashyap

Putting a price on nature, that is, quantifying and monetizing its services seems counter-intuitive—especially in the contexts of environmental degradation, climate change. It seems, it would only worsen the case for nature, let alone improve it. There is, however, a twist in the tail— what if this price accorded to nature finally makes it too costly to exploit? And therefore, at long last, making it's protection a priority? Or would it backfire?

Nature as capital?

The understanding of natural resources as capital stems from what is already in practice— it is difficult to imagine production without any resource input from nature, whether direct or processed. A very basic requirement for economic production is land. But unlike other physical capital, the stock of natural capital cannot be substituted or renewed easily. If natural resources are to be considered as capital or inputs, their contribution must also appear on the ledger. This is precisely what Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) aims to do— if natural resources are so vital for production, they must be recognised as an asset that is managed and maintained, with their contribution (and depreciation) measured and considered in policy-making .

What the GDP does not show

GDP looks at only one part of economic performance— income— but says less about the assets that underlie them. An even graver issue is the under-representation of natural capital and services. Although it manages to include the income from the felling of trees, it overlooks the services that trees render—air filtration, carbon sequestration, among many others. A country could seemingly clear all its forests and use those resources to spike up the GDP to unprecedented levels, but it will lead to depreciation and more clearly, depletion of this very vital resource. This is exactly what GDP misses out. There is, however, a new standard now— one that could potentially relieve nature from this ordeal— The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA).

The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting

The SEEA attempts to put nature and growth on an equal footing in decisions about economic development. To understand the structure of the SEEA it is essential to first be acquainted with the knowledge of ecosystem services. There are a myriad services that nature provides, most of which are invisible to us— and therefore ignored. From trees filtering the air, water bodies assimilating wastes, bees helping in pollination, to mangroves preventing soil erosion and restricting storms— all are services rendered by nature. In quantifying the same, we acknowledge the possible economic and monetary losses that we would have to bear, if these cost-free services, were absent. But that is not all. We attach cultural values to ecosystems as well and especially communities which have lived in close intimacy with nature for generations. These qualitative variables have been a major hindrance towards achieving a standard to quantify nature's services. However, it seems possible now.

There are several benefits to monetary estimation. It will provide a better comparability when deciding on issues of national importance, like budget allocation. The cost-benefit analysis, that this standard enables, will help in addressing the dilemma over economic development or environmental protection— a critical juncture developing countries often find themselves in. Indeed, it can be the balance that sustainable development long asked for.

Concerns and Criticism: What do we value?

The concept of value has an important bearing in this discussion. Economist Mariana Mazzucato in their book “The Value of Everything” explores how value and how we assign things value has changed over time— from assigning price to valuable things to determining whether a product is valuable by looking only at its price. In simpler words, only those things are valued, that can fetch a price. This change has prompted the necessity of assigning nature a price— because without it, we just would not care. But there are non-use and non-consumptive services rendered by nature— one's culture, especially in India, is more or less influenced by the ecosystem they reside in. One might just enjoy a beautiful sunset or just be content at the thought that nature exists. In light of that, it is useful to ask— why should valuing nature be only legitimized by its economic viability? The answer to this can only be found in our values.



THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE INDEFINITE CHINESE LOANS

By Atisha Mahajan

China is the Asian hero. A country nestled between the haphazard geography of the least developed and developing nations, playing at par with the giants of the developed western world. The ethics of its economic means for the acquisition of geopolitical power are especially scrutinized upon. It's a curious case of indefinite Chinese loans. The origin of the problem is clearly reflected in the numbers itself. The Chinese state and its counterparts have approximately lent \$1.5 trillion in different schemes to over 150 countries around the world. In fact, China has emerged as one of the most prominent global lenders in the last two decades with an outstanding claim exceeding 5% of the global GDP. Despite these significantly large figures, its official data on lending is minimal and obscure.

China's systematic 'underreporting' of loans has also led to immense confusion over the total volume of its lending project. This is especially problematic since official records on many Chinese debts are amiss from major data sources such as The World Bank, IMF and other credit-rating agencies. This entails that debt sustainability analysis and other policy research conducted by such bodies is inaccurate and misleading. This further has implications for private sector firms which invest heavily in financially evaluating the government bonds of various countries. Ultimately, the monetary risk of such discrepancies is shouldered by investors who make investment decisions on the crutches of misinformation.

However, in the midst of all this opacity, a disconcertingly clear pattern—which can help explain China's dubious generosity—has emerged. Over 50% of the loans extended to developing nations are unreported and channeled towards large-scale infrastructure projects under China's ambitious multi-billion dollar 'Belt and Road Initiative'. This project aims at developing a network of roads, ports and other structures extending from East Asia to Europe to aid connectivity between the regions. Loans are extended with the reassurance that repayments will be feasible once projects become operational, however, there is no formal guarantee of the same. This is the basis of what many policy analysts around the globe have termed as China's 'debt-trap diplomacy'. Here's how it rolls out: China loans a handsome sum of money to a struggling nation, say Nation X, to invest in a major highway. However, the terms of this loan are fairly vague. Due to some reasons, Nation X is unable to repay China in time, and to recover its money China now takes control of Nation X's highway. However, the controversial speculation is that China probably extended the loan to Nation X knowing its inability to repay in the first place; that it was eyeing the geopolitical asset right from the beginning.

Something similar took place in Sri Lanka in 2017 when the government was compelled to lease its geopolitically-strategic Hambantota port to China for a period of 99 years. This case became the poster-child of China's alleged 'debt-trap diplomacy' and confirmed the claim that the initiative was a predatory one aimed at securing China's geopolitical interests in strategic regions. However, it is believed that the Chinese have indeed been willing to restructure loan terms, and have also never actually 'seized' assets particularly. To begin with, this project was commissioned in 2007, six years before Xi Jinping rolled out the Belt and Road Initiative. A Chinese construction firm, China Harbor Group, won the contract for the port and China Eximbank agreed to fund it. US \$307 million was offered on an interest rate chosen by Sri Lanka, and the first phase of the port was scheduled to be completed within three years. Without waiting for the first phase to generate revenue, Mahinda Rajapaksa—the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka—pushed to start phase two and another \$757 million was borrowed at a lower interest rate. By 2014, the port was rapidly losing money and Sri Lanka signed an agreement with The China Harbour and The China Merchants Group to jointly operate the port for a period of 35 years.

The government changed in 2015, and when Sirisena, the new Prime Minister, won the country was sinking in debt. It owed more to Japan, the World Bank and Asia Development Bank than it did to China. As a result, Sri Lanka arranged for a bailout from the IMF, and decided to generate revenue by leasing the port out to an experienced firm. The only two bids came from China Merchants and China Harbor, and the former won a 99-year lease on the port. Whether China's intentions with its financial offerings are strategically motivated or not will continue to be up for debate. Given that China's policy towards transparency on its international lending is already so dense, the international community needs to ensure that beneficiary countries tread carefully with their terms to avoid being obligated to the Red Dragon politically or otherwise. All moves need to be observed closely, and pressure needs to be built from the relevant bodies to hold China accountable for its exercises which have spillover effects globally.



DOES THE QUAD MARK A SHIFT IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY?

By Pratul Chaturvedi

Introduction

The Quad is an informal strategic dialogue between India, Australia, Japan and the United States with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region. On 12th March 2021, representatives from these nations met virtually for the first Quad summit. In the summit, the Quad alliance stressed on the necessity of ensuring an ‘open’ and ‘free’ Indo-Pacific region as their primary objective. This summit was important not only because the members were meeting for the first time since the idea was floated in 2007 but, it is also monumental because it signals a shift towards the West in India’s foreign policy which has stood proud over its non-aligned status. Hence, I will be assessing in this article whether this shift is real or is a way of advancing national interests through hedging.

India’s way: Non-Alignment

Non-alignment was a policy fashioned during the Cold War, that provided the newly independent nations from contrasting groups- who were either in proximity or dependent on one or the other bloc- an opportunity to protect their autonomy. Thus, Non-alignment emerged to be a tenet in foreign policies of such nations especially India.

But with the end of the Cold War and disbanding of the Soviet bloc, India needed to diversify its network of relationships across the erstwhile east-west divide to get the benefits of globalization. Thus, Non-alignment lost its relevance, and NAM its original reason for existence in India’s foreign policy

Signals of shift?

In recent years, non-alignment has not been projected explicitly by our policymakers as a tenet of India’s foreign policy with India’s External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar recently saying that non-alignment was a concept of relevance in a specific era and a particular context. However, we have not yet found a universally accepted cornerstone of our foreign policy. But the regular incursions from the Chinese side seems to have made a major change.

The bitter standoffs with China in recent years-especially after the Galwan Valley standoff in 2020- forced India to recalibrate its external engagements. India embarked on a major foreign policy overdrive from Look East to Act East by bringing its vision for a rules-based Indo-Pacific as a cornerstone of its diplomacy and displaying a steely resolve to fashion a regional environment conducive to its strategic interests. India mounted a diplomatic push focusing on boosting ties with the US and its allies to increase its geopolitical heft and position itself as a credible force wedded to peace, stability and international law in contrast to China’s transgression attempts. India’s engagement with western powers is nothing new but what is a remarkable change in the trajectory of India’s non-alignment is its openness to engage in potential military alliances.

The role played in revival in 2017 and subsequent joining of the Quad by India is a signal to India being open to potential military engagements with the West. In November 2020, the navies of Australia, India, Japan and the United States held their biggest naval drills this month, sending warships, submarines and aircraft to the Indian Ocean, in a move analysts said signalled the four countries’ seriousness in countering China’s military and political influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This expansion of the Malabar exercise that began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between India and the US to Japan in 2015 and then Australia joining the exercise for the first time since 2007 is only one recent instance in India’s shifting alignments. Besides the Quad, India signed the so-called foundational defence agreements such as BECA(Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement) in October 2020 that have facilitated interoperability between the two country’s armed forces sending a strong signal of commitment to the West.

But, India’s refusal of Japan’s suggestion to allow ASEAN in the supply chain trilateral and its confirmation to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO)’s Pabbi Anti-Terror Exercise conveys a different story. This comes as a shock especially to the US as it puts a doubt over the push for a formal alliance with India to counterweight China. For us, it is a sign that India is not looking for any permanent alliance with the West but it is hedging to ensure that India’s capability to advance its national interests is secured.

Conclusion

Though non-alignment policy might be dead it seems that the independence of action that was enshrined in it seems to be the driving cog of India’s foreign policy. India’s membership of the Quad should for now be rather seen as an intersection of India and the West’s self-interests with no formal alliance on cards. It should only be seen in the way as Dr Jaishankar aptly puts it in his book *The India Way*, that Indian grand strategy in an uncertain world requires “advancing [its] national interests by identifying and exploiting opportunities created by global contradictions” so as “to extract as many gains from as many ties as possible”

GIRL GROUPS AND GENDER GAPS: THE GLOBALIZATION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH K-POP

By Ananya Gupta and Sagara Anny John



During her inaugural speech in 2013, former South Korean President Park Geun Hye remarked that “In the 21st century, culture is power”. True to her words, South Korea’s K-pop industry has gained prominence over the past decade, even making its presence known in the sphere of international diplomacy. From sending the popular girl group Red Velvet to perform for Kim Jong Un to gifting a signed K-Pop album to the Indonesian president’s daughter, South Korea has actively utilized the far-reaching influence of its pop stars as a tool to facilitate good-will diplomacy. However, the global impact of these pop stars is not limited to the realm of international relations. As cultural ambassadors for South Korea, K-Pop idols act as the first point of contact for millions of fans around the world. On one hand, this means that K-Pop fans from different backgrounds are familiarized with the Korean way of life, paving the way for more cross-cultural understanding. On the other hand, the spread of K-Pop beyond the borders of South Korea means that a lot of the country’s less-than-stellar aspects are also exported to all corners of the planet.

Gender Inequality in South Korea

South Korea has consistently been ranked among the worst nations in the world for gender equality in studies such as the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report. From widespread workplace discrimination to poor political representation, the patriarchal nature of South Korean society has marginalized Korean women on its path towards prosperity.

Many of the struggles faced by Korean women today can be traced back to the Neo-Confucian ideas that influence gender perceptions in the country. Confucian principles dictate that women must remain subservient to men and practice the “feminine arts” of chastity and modesty. Combining this ideology with the prevalence of a powerful prostitution industry spells disaster for the state of gender perceptions in the country. It creates a culture that believes an ideal woman to be innocent and chaste while simultaneously fetishizing her as a sexual object. Yet another damaging practice that stems from Confucianism is Korea’s obsession with women’s appearances. Korean women are constantly judged on whether they meet extremely high standards of beauty instead of objective measures of their competence. This culture of “lookism” in South Korea has become so normalized that parents often gift their children plastic surgeries for graduation, hoping to provide them with an advantage in the job market.

Gender Inequality in K-Pop

Like in every other nation, the media produced in South Korea reflects the stereotypes that are prevalent in its society. As a result, K-Pop has become the flag-bearer for the country’s most regressive gender perceptions.

K-Pop celebrities are seen as the embodiment of the “ideal self”. However, female idols are dealt a rough hand in this model of fame due to the imposition of cultural norms on their public image. Entertainment agencies carefully craft the identities of these idols, actively perpetuating a ‘sweet and innocent’ image that is in accordance with Confucian stereotypes. The popular ‘girl-crush’ concept establishes a girl-next-door image, with idols donning Lolita-Esque outfits that make them accessible to the male gaze and boost their popularity. For twenty years now, all the South Korean girl groups that have earned the title of ‘National Girl Group’ have done so by employing this specific image.

South Korea’s rampant sexual objectification is especially visible in the promotion of female idols by referencing their physical features. Female idols are often popularised as having ‘ant waists’ or ‘11-abs’. This disproportionate emphasis on body parts solidifies the idea that women are valuable only for their appearances. If any such relationships are exposed, the female celebrity involved faces greater risk than her male counterpart because of the damage done to the male fantasies that feed her success.

Influence of K-Pop on Gender Perceptions Across the World

As K-Pop groups have skyrocketed in popularity, the prevalence of gender inequality in the industry has not been without consequence. According to a recent study conducted by The Research Institute of Asian Women, greater K-Pop consumption was found to be correlated with less egalitarian gender attitudes among fans of the genre. A large portion of these fans was female, and they characterised themselves to be aligned with traditional gender roles, like that of a ‘caretaker’, for their male idols. This correlation was found to be especially strong in countries that already suffer from high levels of gender inequality.

Despite President Moon Jae-in’s commitments towards addressing his country’s gender gap, the government-sponsored promotion of K-Pop is likely to counteract any such efforts. As young K-Pop fans across the world tune in to their favourite bands, they unknowingly subscribe to age-old stereotypes about gender roles that women have fought to eradicate for centuries. So as long as the K-Pop industry refuses to address its deep-set gender biases, South Korea will continue to run the risk of exporting its gender inequality to the rest of the world.



OVER THE TOP (OTT) PLATFORM AND TECH LAWS: THE TALE AND THE TELLING OF NETFLIX & CHILLING

By Dikshi Arora

When the pandemic hit the Box Office hard, the OTT platforms flourished with an exponential increase in their subscriber count. It has also provided an easement for the producers to showcase their content without undergoing many certifications and licensing. In fact, some of the filmmakers have shifted from traditional cinema to the OTT platforms for the liberty to produce a variety of content. Currently, there is no legislation to govern digital content but on February 25, the government brought in detailed guidelines for digital content on both digital media and Over The Top (OTT) platforms under the ambit of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021. This move will not only restrict free speech, expression, and artistic freedom of creators but also curtail the audience's right to consume a wide variety of digital content. It can further lead to a 'big brother' situation which will stifle not just creativity but freedom of expression, while giving overriding powers to the government to step in.

Moreover, the government has equipped itself with "emergency" powers. The rules state, "in case of emergency nature" the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting may, "if he is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient and justifiable" give orders to block public access of any information. Importantly, such orders can be released "without giving an opportunity of hearing" to the publishing platform. Minister has also clarified that no new law has been framed and the government already has power to step in in case of an emergency under the existing law.

A Glance at Global Trend

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) in Turkey, The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) in Singapore keeps a close eye on the OTTs functioning in their countries. Under the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, Australia regulates OTT content through a mechanism that is complaint-based. The UK does not have any specific regulations on OTTs while Saudi Arabia's overarching anti-cybercrime law framework regulates the content. Even in the United States, policy experts have argued that the government can't maintain its paternalistic role in technology if they want society to benefit from technological development (FCC v. Fox Television Stations, Inc., 567 US 239 (2012)). In Singapore, the regulatory mechanism is such that firstly, the OTT platforms have to get a licence issued by Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) and the content classification is done by the service providers.

Thanks for letting us Netflix and Chill!

A PIL was filed in Delhi High Court in 2018 by Justice for Rights Foundation under Article 226 of the Constitution of India requesting a separate regulatory code for OTT platforms that showcased obscenity and abusive language. The Judgement delivered by the Hon'ble High Court established that the Information Technology Act, 2000 is enough for regulating OTT platforms and no external regulations are required. In *Padmanabh Shankar v. Association of India* case, Karnataka High Court held that the Cinematograph Act, 1952 applies just to cinematograph films inside the significance of Section 2(dd) of the Cinematograph Act. It was also held that transmission or broadcasting of films, serials, and so forth through the web won't go under the domain of the Cinematograph Act, 1952. Hence, regulating OTT platforms under the Cinematograph Act, 1952 would be a flawed interpretation of the law.

Enough Support to Support New OTT Platform

The freedom to publish or broadcast content often invites criticism. Under the principles of the Self-regulation code 2019, OTT platforms have agreed to ensure that they shall not broadcast any content that breaks the nation's law, disrespects the national flag and emblem, promotes violence or terrorism against the country, shows child sex, or "encourages and promotes to disrespect to the integrity and sovereignty of India". Moreover, provisions of the Indian Penal Code such as Section 292 to Section 294 that provide instances of restrictions on the freedom of speech and expression in the interest of decency or morality are applicable to OTT content.

When the content is obscene and depicts women in an objectionable manner, it attracts the provisions of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 and charges under Section 509 of IPC against the producers of such shows. Section 3 and Section 4 of Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 deal with the prohibition on transmitting and publishing indecent representation of women in any form. The only exception made thereto lies in, if it has been done so in the interest of arts, literature, and religious purposes, but does not include the domain for films solely for 'entertainment' purposes. Hence, there are sufficient general as well as special legislative provisions to impose reasonable restrictions on OTT platforms, and treating them like films or television programmes would not fulfil the purpose due to the difference in nature of these platforms.

Moreover, OTT platforms also display a disclaimer regarding their content. Some allow for parental control through the creation of different profiles for children and adults, sharing a common account for an OTT platform. This would allow creators to make the content freely, encourage creative growth, improve the revenue of the industry and the stakeholders, address viewer concerns, and yet uphold the necessary restrictions on free speech and expression. It is said that instead of soft-touch monitoring, the government has opted for predatory new rules.



ENVIRONMENTAL CASTEISM: AN OVERDUE APOLOGY WE OWE TO ECOLOGY AND VICTIMS OF CASTE

By Noor Sharma and Ashika Thomas

Manual Scavenging

The practice of manual scavenging or cleaning of human excrement from latrines, sewers and septic tanks, is driven by caste hierarchy. Majority of the workers in this practice belong to the Bhangi, who are considered the "untouchables among untouchables". Despite the existence of a prohibition and rehabilitation act since 2013, an RTI filed by the Wire revealed that the number of manual scavengers have only continued to grow. Among the several reasons for this, the existence of a national act over an effective grassroots level scheme is a major one.

The reason that projects like Garima Abhiyan, succeeded in freeing scavengers from this job was their approach of giving a new means of livelihood which is independent of one's social stature. The government's act involves giving money to manual scavengers and punishing those who hire them, but they do not consider providing livelihoods. This causes Dalits to work as manual scavengers in the informal work sector to make ends meet, continuing the cycle of oppression. Taking reference from Banerjee and Duflo's award winning work on poverty-alleviation, giving manual scavengers an opportunity to choose their livelihood by building up on their human capital and material assets could bring them into the formal work sector, making them eligible for government welfare schemes.

Casteism In Residence

Reminiscent of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984, wherein an entire village in Bhopal was subjected to a life-altering gas leak by a pesticide plant, India has its environmental evils to fight. The Jaiprakash Nagar colony residents, about 600 metres away from the factory, housed most of the labourers, cart pullers, and junk sellers. The lack of concern is highlighted by the fact that there is no closure to the case even after three decades.

North-East India, especially the state of Assam, has continuously been subjected to environmental disregard, despite its rich biodiversity. The Environment Impact Assessment allowed industries to set base with lesser regulations. Blatant disregard in the case of money-making industries led to the Baghjan blowout, a fire in Assam, which sent more than 5,000 people to relief camps, caused due to major lapses on Oil India Limited's (OIL) part. They didn't overlook central government's policy-making; instead, it can be reasoned through their treatment of the Seven Sisters as outcasts.

However, in India, discrimination doesn't stop at one's facial features but extends to one's caste. Even when it comes to access to essential resources such as fuelwood and water, caste hierarchy trumps humans' survival. Last February, in the Fatehpur district of Madhya Pradesh, Dalits suffered at the hands of these age-old repressive policies. Madan Balmik, a Dalit man, bore his caste's burden- the episode in summary, "one of the daughters swilled a pot, some water splashed on a forester, who, enraged, hurled casteist slurs at them, and shot dead Madan when he reached the spot to quell the tension," narrated a report.

Casteism in Disaster Relief

Natural disasters are also driven by notions of caste status. These vulnerable sections of the society face discrimination during distribution of financial aid and their precarious living conditions before the disasters makes them more prone to the after-effects. This phenomenon is defined by the RIGHTS NGO as "discrimination by default", since members of higher social standing usually live in easily accessible areas.

A study by the University of British Columbia found that "in the immediate aftermath of the (2004 Indian Ocean) tsunami, authorities brought in Dalits from other areas to remove dead bodies. However, they were not provided with gloves, masks, or other basic measures to prevent infection or the spread of disease. Additionally, Dalits are often not included in official fisherman organizations and are not allowed government aid post a tsunami. Once again, just like in the case of manual scavengers, there is a structural issue because of which Dalits cannot break out of oppression. Being a part of the informal work sector is a substantial part of this structural issue.

Conclusion

While the protests of major corporate's inconvenience with the environment meet headlines, the struggle of the lower caste is known but not felt, it's realised but not voiced. This neglect has also led to a dichotomy where the iron triangle-government, the bureaucracy, and interest groups, are anthropocentric only when talking about the upper class and swiftly transition to becoming ignorant in the matters of the marginalised. Therefore, Mukul Sharma very truly states, "Unless the intertwining of caste and nature is seriously addressed in environmental and policy discourses, there will neither be justice for Dalits, nor for the environment."



PROJECT HUNNAR By Behind The Scenes (BTS)



“When a child is born in this village, they don’t come with lines of fate on their hands, but with lines of debt.”

~ Sanjay Mishra (actor), in the film ‘Kadvi Hawa’ (Bitter Wind)

Project Hunnar was an initiative taken by BTS to promote dignity of labor among the labourers. With our new shift in focus, we have come to identify lack of empathy as one of the prime reasons why the labourers are made to feel inferior. Not only the labourers, but the sheer lack of sensitivity displayed in everyday life is also appalling. The class and caste system along with the grounded belief that an individual’s occupation decided their worth leads to such discrimination. As a result, Project Hunnar was initiated to help the labourers identify and display talents that would help them gain more confidence and raise their self-esteem as well as breaking the cycle of thought that they are skilled at only menial jobs. The scope of this project had to be reduced, due to the nature of online platforms and the ongoing pandemic, but what makes us proud is the fact that even with these events occurring, the labourers were motivated to participate and cooperate with our rules. Perhaps, we learned about motivation and opportunities as much as them getting a platform to show the society their will and determination.

When thinking about dignity of labour, one realizes what a broad topic it is. Our thought to emphasise on this aspect came from everyday problems that we saw our own helpers face. It is like a grounded thought that the individual who is doing work, that we ourselves would not do, is in social standing, ‘lower’ than us. People in society often forget that such workers are the ones who in reality, uphold their social status’ and households. Another reason that led us to this topic was workplace confidence and discrimination. Though the modern era is said to be that of development, there is still rampant caste and class discrimination happening. When an individual’s life is clouded by uncertainty, entering a profession that threatens the survival of that individual is not usually a welcomed idea. It could include low wages, increasing their own burdens or even the rampant unemployment existing which could prevent them from pursuing their vocational talents. Acknowledging and discovering such reasons was another attempt by Team Behind The Scenes to bring talent and recognition from all walks of life to the forefront, standing by the belief that talent knows no caste or class. Project Hunnar was one such attempt made by our Team to restore people’s confidence in themselves and their occupations.

We essentially asked people through NGOs, and personal contacts to help us reach labourers in different parts of the country to send in their videos, displaying any talent they are confident about. The eligibility was decided for individuals who were working or were employed. We tried to give them a platform for the wonderful skills they possess and applaud their efforts ranging from singing, dancing and artwork. The workers spared no effort to raise the bar of the competition, making it worthy of their talent. With cash prizes upto Rs. 10,000, helpyourhelpers kits and two special choice awards, we had multiple entries along with a distinguished panel of four judges. This included Saudamini Sharma, an artist and architect who is highly acclaimed for her work, Kimberly Manners, a professor at NID in Multidisciplinary Design, Chandra Banerjee, a highly accomplished musician and singer and Abhinaya Penneswaran, trained in four dance forms and a professor at Ashoka University. The results were no doubt much anticipated and were announced on our official youtube channel. Our three honourable winners were Mahendri didi in the first place, who performed a beautiful song, Poonam Didi in the second place, who danced to the song Mukabala from the film, Street Dancer and Pooja Didi in the third place, who also danced but to the song Desh Rangila Rangila.

As novel and inspiring it was for us to organise this event, many of our participants reverted back to us saying that all their lives, they simply wanted their voices to be heard. It was a lifelong dream that was finally fulfilled and it meant the world for them to be able to participate without the worries of the village elders objecting to it. We hope that our initiative was able to serve its purpose and the lives of the many people who participated were, in some way, enriched with the courage to display and pursue their talents professionally.

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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 guidelines on <https://nickeledanddimed.com> and email your article to cnes.jgu@gmail.com

OTHER INITIATIVES BY THE CENTRE FOR NEW ECONOMICS STUDIES

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.

CONVERSATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES: The student-run publication is an in-house, peer-review journal of OP Jindal Global University which aims to promote a variety of perspectives from different scholars over a stated theme.

INFOSPHERE: 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.

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

AZAAD AWAAZ: This monthly magazine (Patrika) aims to focus on the marginalized sections whose voices are often muted in the cacophony of flashy mainstream media discourse.

SWABHIMAAN: The premise of Swabhimaan is based on the themes of Gender and Entrepreneurship but not limited to the conventional meanings they are commonly perceived as.