

CENTRE FOR NEW ECONOMICS STUDIES

Nickeled & Dimed



EDITORS' NOTE

Nickeled and Dimed, the official research platform of the Centre for New Economics Studies (CNES) at Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, serves as an open academic forum. It offers well-researched, balanced commentaries on critical political, economic, social, and legal issues across seven research clusters: Public Policy, International Relations, Legal Studies, Environment & Social Issues, Gender & Society, History & Culture, and Finance & Economics.

In an era of abundant information but scarce clarity, Nickeled and Dimed bridges academic inquiry with public discourse. This edition comprises of insightful articles that address contemporary issues and examines their broader implications through books, critical commentaries, and audio-visual narratives.

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- **Environment and Social Issues-** Trading the Sky: How Climate Governance Recycles Imperial Power
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PUBLIC POLICY CLUSTER

AADHAR AND ALGORITHMIC EXCLUSION FROM WELFARE: CASE STUDY FROM JHARKHAND



INTRODUCTION

The Aadhar program by UIDAI is the largest biometric ID in the world. Its primary motivation was simple: to make it easier for people to connect with the government and cut out corrupt middlemen and bureaucratic hurdles that had stopped welfare from reaching people in India. When the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution linked Aadhar to PDS, which benefits more than 800 million Indians, to correct a longstanding problem of ghost beneficiaries. These fictitious records allowed corrupt PDS dealers to siphon off subsidy benefits easily. The solution was to link Aadhar numbers with the ration cards, make biometric checks mandatory at points of distribution, and create a system by which only authenticated individuals could collect the grain. But in practice, how it worked showed a big gap between policy aims and real-life scenarios. The piece focuses on the State of Jharkhand, a state with a tribal and Dalit population. Case studies in the last decade have reported that the system algorithm denied PDS subsidy to poor people (BPL), leading to starvation deaths.

In explanation of this exclusion, this piece looks at the Aadhar identification algorithm system, which has three levels: biometric authentication, demographic seeding, and PDS rules. Poor data quality is the biggest problem, and it creates risk along every point of the process - from misspelling names when seeding data, to worn-out fingerprints at authentication points. Each type of data flaw easily results in a breakdown of critical service delivery, as highlighted in the [UIDAI committee report of 2009](#). Collectively, this transforms what people are entitled to into a matter of probabilistic outcomes based on the quality of the data and the efficiency of the algorithms at work in the system. For the most vulnerable groups in Jharkhand, these failures have not been minor administrative obstacles but obstacles to the people in the face of survival.

FROM DETERMINISTIC TO PROBABILISTIC IDENTITY:

Historically, welfare identity checks were quite straightforward: physical papers of ration cards, voter IDs, or driver's licenses issued by trusted authorities and accepted by the state as proof of identity. These papers could be forged, but it was a clear, generally human process. If a dealer refused rations on presentation of a valid card, you could easily challenge. Aadhaar changes this to a probabilistic system. Biometric checks are not merely "yes" or "no." The system compares patterns to reference templates kept in the Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR) and produces a matching score that estimates how likely it is that two templates come from the same person. UIDAI sets a threshold: above it, it's a match; below it, a non-match. The identity of a citizen becomes a statistical probability from an algorithm, not just their presence or need.

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud's dissent in the Puttaswamy case lays the legal foundation to challenge this probabilistic exclusion. He said that basic inalienable rights should not be left to the probabilities of a tech system. He applied the proportionality tests on the Aadhar Act and found it disproportionate because its exclusion could starve people, which would be against Article 21, Right to Life. A poor family at a ration shop may face food insecurity on account of authentication failure. The dissent notes that "Biometric systems, by their very nature, work on a probabilistic model," and fingerprints get affected by age, hard work, illness, and disability, among other factors. In India, this is particularly devastating for the marginalised and poor. He concludes: "Dignity and the rights of individuals cannot depend on algorithms or probabilities."

The 2009 UIDAI Committee Report warned that collecting good data would be hard. It said that the system cannot reliably identify damaged or worn fingerprints, which is quite common among workers and the elderly, and that fact reduces success rates. That warning makes later mandatory use more troubling. The Aadhaar process works in three linked stages, and bad data hits each one. At the demographic seeding level, using de-duplication, the state matches PDS records with Aadhaar records to find "ghost" entries with no matching Aadhaar number or where details don't fit. Spelling errors, transliterations, or data-entry errors create mismatches and exclude real beneficiaries.

At the stage of biometric authentication, that is, through the electronic Point of Sale device, even the UIDAI's Biometrics Standards Committee in 2009 acknowledged that fingerprint authentication is very difficult to collect and analyze in India. They mentioned that the fingerprint quality "has not been tested" well for Indian users, especially those who have worn fingerprints due to labour, which causes high false rejection rates. The system requires concurrent availability of electricity, internet, biometric sensors, and backend servers, which is a rare commodity in rural areas. At the PDS rules level, OTP-based checks or manual overwriting were supposed to be done; given the scale of failures, these options are often disincentivized of considering corruption and deviating from mandatory Aadhaar identification. In programs like PM-KISAN, the remedy is merely to wait for system corrections to reach the top, which delays services. Scholars argue that it is impossible for these ad hoc and weakly implemented fixes to properly address broad exclusion risks.

JHARKHAND: WHEN ALGORITHMS FAIL, PEOPLE STARVE:

The case study of Algorithmic exclusion is frequently seen in the State of Jharkhand. The case of “Aadhar causing hunger is Santoshi Kumari, an 11-year-old Dalit girl” from Simdega district. Months before she died, the local government stopped her family’s ration card because it wasn’t linked to an Aadhar number. Even though the family lived in poverty and were present, the ration shop wouldn’t give them food because the system wouldn’t accept a cancelled card. Santoshi’s case wasn’t unusual, and it demonstrated a real pattern. In October 2017, 60-year-old Adivasi man Ruplal Marandi in Jharkhand’s Deoghar district died after his family was denied rations for two months because biometric authentication failed and he could not prove his identity. The Right to Food Campaign investigated 57 starvation deaths from 2015 to 2018 and found at least 19 deaths directly tied to Aadhar problems.

Further, a study discussed in the 2016-2017 Indian Budget showed failure rates of 49% in Jharkhand, 37% in Rajasthan, 6% in Gujarat, and 5% in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh. The report thus stated: “Failure to identify genuine beneficiaries results in exclusion errors.” Those who Aadhar was meant to help are being left out.

THE PATH FORWARD: ALGORITHMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

International legislations provide examples regarding the treatment of large, risk-prone algorithm systems. Canada's Algorithmic Impact Assessment (AIA) is a determination test that scores systems on risk and impact, placing them into four levels based on what could go wrong. For a Level 4 system making automated decisions, the Canadian Directive requires that not all decisions be fully automated, and a human must review decisions before they are final. The system must be checked by independent experts, users must be informed about why a certain decision was made, and there must be a detailed backup plan in case the system fails. Similarly, the European AI Act classifies AI systems according to risk, and the higher-risk categories call for strict, error-free data standards that ensure high accuracy and reliability.

CONCLUSION

An AIA framework for welfare technologies is what India should be using. As it stands, the system assumes people with lack of identification to be treated as ghosts until proven. An AIA system should be able to assume that people are real until they are proven otherwise. This shifts the burden of error from poor citizens onto the state itself. In no case should an AIA framework clear a welfare program to be linked to Aadhaar unless data quality audits are done. It should demand mandatory, legally protected human overrides, which cannot be blocked by administrative action. Most importantly, it must echo what Justice Chandrachud said: dignity and rights can't depend on algorithms or chance. When life and death are at stake, the algorithmic error should favour inclusion, not exclusion.

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ENVIRONMENT CLUSTER

TRADING THE SKY: HOW CLIMATE GOVERNANCE RECYCLES IMPERIAL POWER



INTRODUCTION

Climate governance is routinely presented as a neutral, cooperative exercise in managing a shared planetary emergency, guided by technical expertise and economic rationality. In practice, however, the institutions and mechanisms through which climate action is pursued reflect long-standing asymmetries in power, wealth, and decision-making authority. Market-based tools such as carbon trading, offsets, and climate finance are defended as pragmatic responses to political and economic constraints, and there are coherent reasons for their adoption. Yet their operation has tended to prioritise flexibility for high-emitting states and corporations while relocating the social and ecological costs of adjustment to regions with less influence over rule-making. The result is a system in which responsibility travels more easily than emissions, environmental protection is mediated through financial instruments, and historical patterns of resource control reappear in modern, carefully technocratic form.

OUTSOURCING RESPONSIBILITY: WHEN EMISSIONS TRAVEL BETTER THAN PEOPLE

One of the quieter achievements of contemporary climate governance is how efficiently responsibility has been made mobile. Greenhouse gases are global, but accountability is not. Industrialised states have perfected a system in which the obligation to reduce emissions is increasingly displaced rather than fulfilled. Carbon markets, offset arrangements, and “flexibility mechanisms” allow emissions-intensive economies to continue production while purchasing reductions elsewhere, usually in regions with lower political leverage and cheaper land.

The historical context matters. The United States and Europe together account for a disproportionate share of cumulative carbon dioxide emissions since the Industrial Revolution. According to data compiled by Our World in Data, the U.S. alone is responsible for roughly a quarter of historical CO₂ emissions, despite representing a small fraction of the global population. This accumulated atmospheric occupation is not erased by recent pledges or accounting innovations. Carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for centuries, which means historical emissions are not a moral footnote but a physical reality.

Yet contemporary climate policy often treats emissions as interchangeable units detached from history. A tonne reduced in one location is framed as equivalent to a tonne emitted elsewhere, regardless of who emitted it, why, or under what conditions. This abstraction is convenient. It allows high-income countries to claim progress without materially altering consumption patterns or energy systems. The social and ecological costs of adjustment are relocated to regions already facing climate vulnerability, weak regulatory enforcement, and legacies of land dispossession.

Offset projects illustrate this pattern clearly. Forest conservation initiatives in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia are routinely packaged as mitigation tools for corporations headquartered thousands of kilometres away. Additionally, the idea that emissions reductions would not have occurred without the project remains notoriously difficult to prove. Still, credits are issued, sold, and retired, allowing emissions elsewhere to continue with a clean balance sheet.

The effect is not accidental. These mechanisms align neatly with the interests of states and firms seeking minimal disruption. Structural transformation is expensive and politically risky. Purchasing credits is cheaper and comes with the added benefit of reputational insulation. Climate responsibility, in this framework, becomes something that can be subcontracted.

GREEN MARKETS, OLD HIERARCHIES: THE FINANCIALISATION OF THE ATMOSPHERE

The rapid expansion of carbon pricing and emissions trading regimes reflects a conscious policy choice rather than an accidental turn toward markets. These mechanisms emerged in response to a recurring constraint in climate governance: the difficulty of imposing uniform emissions limits across economies with vastly different levels of industrialisation, energy dependence, and political tolerance for disruption. By allowing emissions reductions to occur where they are cheapest, carbon markets are intended to reduce overall compliance costs and make climate commitments more politically feasible. In theory, flexibility is not a loophole but a feature.

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Carbon markets operate within global financial systems that already reflect uneven access to capital, technical expertise, and bargaining power. Large corporations and financial intermediaries are generally better positioned to navigate these systems, particularly where participation depends on familiarity with complex verification methodologies, registry rules, and contract structures. These arrangements are formally open, but the learning curve is steep and the margins for error are thin.

As a result, flexibility, the supposed great equaliser, tends to work more smoothly for actors who can afford teams of consultants to interpret it.

For corporations, carbon markets also function as instruments of strategic positioning. Rather than committing to near-term reductions in production or fossil fuel use, firms can outline net-zero trajectories built around future offset purchases, anticipated technological advances, or nature-based mitigation projects. Assessments of corporate climate commitments by independent research organisations and financial regulators, comparing stated targets against disclosed emissions inventories and capital expenditure patterns, consistently show that many net-zero pledges rely heavily on offsets rather than absolute emissions cuts. Ambition, at least on paper, remains intact. Day-to-day production patterns, less so.

This pattern is not best understood as a collection of individual corporate failures, even if it does occasionally test one's patience. It reflects a regulatory environment that prioritises market compatibility over enforceable limits on extraction and production. Fossil fuel subsidies continue at scale, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars annually when both direct and indirect support is included. At the same time, firms are encouraged to participate in voluntary carbon markets and disclosure initiatives that allow them to signal climate leadership. These two policy tracks coexist with surprisingly little discomfort, suggesting that the preference for continuity is doing a lot of quiet work.

Meanwhile, the communities hosting offset and mitigation projects absorb a disproportionate share of the risk. When carbon prices fluctuate, methodologies are revised, or projects are deemed non-compliant, local livelihoods are often the first to feel the effects. Environmental benefits may be abstracted into tradable units, but land, water, and social relations remain firmly local. The atmosphere may travel well across markets and borders. The consequences, less so.

WHO PAYS FOR REPAIR: CLIMATE FINANCE, LOSS, AND THE POLITICS OF DELAY

Climate finance is frequently presented as the corrective mechanism that balances historical inequities. Wealthy countries pledge funds to support mitigation and adaptation in lower-income regions, ostensibly recognising differentiated responsibility. In practice, this promise has been unevenly fulfilled. The long-standing commitment by developed countries to mobilise USD 100 billion annually was met only after significant delay and creative accounting.

The creativity turns the funds into loans rather than grants, which turns climate finance into a revenue stream and also increases the financial burden on fiscally strained economies.

Adaptation and damage funding, which address climate impacts that cannot be avoided, receive far less attention than mitigation projects that can attract private investment. From a financial perspective? this makes sense. From a climate security perspective? It doesn't do much.

The emerging architecture around loss and damage illustrates the tension. Acknowledging irreversible harm implies responsibility. Responsibility raises uncomfortable questions about compensation, liability, and reparations. Unsurprisingly, progress in this area has been slow, cautious, and heavily qualified. Wealthy states express concern about "liability exposure," as though the climate crisis were an unforeseen inconvenience rather than the predictable outcome of centuries of industrial expansion.

Corporations occupy a similar position. Research has shown that a small number of fossil fuel producers are linked to a large share of historical emissions. Yet regulatory responses continue to focus on consumer behaviour, lifestyle adjustments, and voluntary corporate disclosure. Structural accountability remains elusive. It is easier to ask individuals to recycle than to regulate extraction.

The result is a climate response that manages symptoms while preserving underlying hierarchies. Those with the least responsibility are asked to adapt fastest. Those with the greatest capacity to pay negotiate timelines, offsets, and exemptions. The language of partnership masks a persistent imbalance in who decides, who benefits, and who absorbs loss.

CONCLUSION

What emerges from this landscape is not a failure of climate policy, but a particular kind of success. Emissions reductions are discussed, traded, and reported. Markets expand. Pledges proliferate. Meanwhile, atmospheric concentrations continue to rise, and climate impacts intensify in regions least equipped to absorb them.

The problem is not that climate governance lacks sophistication. It has plenty. The problem is that sophistication has been deployed to manage responsibility rather than confront it. By translating ecological harm into financial instruments, the system allows those who benefited most from fossil-driven growth to delay transformation while appearing engaged.

Addressing climate change under these conditions requires more than better metrics or larger markets. It requires political decisions that disrupt comfort: binding limits on extraction, redistribution of resources without debt, and genuine recognition of historical responsibility. Without this shift, climate policy risks becoming a refined mechanism for preserving inequality under environmental cover.

The crisis is planetary, but the escape routes remain carefully reserved.

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HISTORY CLUSTER

THE UNWRITTEN REALITIES OF DESIRE & SEXUALITY



INTRODUCTION

Cinema is an important tool for regulating, shaping, containing, as well as transforming public perception and contributes significantly to building new notions of normalcy while challenging old norms. Cinema attempts to represent reality in conscious or unconscious ways. It, therefore, actively participates in hegemonic discourse - in part by becoming an instrument of the state which provides legitimacy to state sponsored norms and moralities.

Cinema's evolution plays out in tandem with the evolution of society. Transformation of copyright rules and ethics in filmmaking are dependent, if not decided by societal acceptance and political power. In this context, the portrayal of sexuality and sexual desire in Bollywood has been shaped by change in public perception, acceptance, and socio-political as well as national circumstances. Conceptualisation of sexual desire in Bollywood is marked by inter-related complexities which diversify what desire and sexual identities mean to people and how might these attitudes be challenged and/or contained through visual media.

SEXUAL ATTITUDES : AN INTERPLAY OF RELIGION, TRADITION, AND POLITICS

The existing sexual attitudes in India have helped shape its representation in Bollywood. Studies suggest that Vedic era saw sex as a central and natural component of the Indian psyche and life. Works such as Panchtantra (200-300 BC) and Kamasutra (2nd- 4th Century CE) emphasise three pillars of Hinduism - "Dharma," "Artha" and "Kama" representing religious duty, worldly welfare and sensual aspects of life respectively. Post-vedic period however, was marked by a decreased importance and confinement of women to the household as focus shifted solely towards men as the head of the household, giving importance to sexual gratification of men. By the time coloniality entered India, Indians were subjected to the British guardians of morality. Colonial influence not only termed India's sexually liberal values as 'barbaric' but also prompted to shape a more stigmatized and puritanical view of sex and desire within the subcontinent.

In Woman, Body, Desire in Post-colonial India, Jyoti Puri argues how perception of sexual desire and sexed bodies in India are controlled and regulated by the state, asserting that sex education literature in post-colonial India is built on a definable Indian cultural identity, in turn reinforcing notions of a unique Indianness, sustained through opposition against the modernist constructs of the West. Sexuality, desire, and sexual identities thus become a part of a larger project of nation-building by adhering to national and cultural notions of what it means to be Indian. She discusses how sexuality is key for the very formation of state governance as states consistently use anti-sodomy laws as a way to police sexual and social minorities. Nation-building also centered itself around the city - a symbol of modernity, one that confronts traditional values.

Such progress has been equated to moral degeneration of a nation in India, wherein Western notions of modernity and progress are analogous with increasing female promiscuity and sexual transgression. Thus, with the coming of globality and modernity, female sexual transgression is both a centre of empowerment and containment through state regulation.

REPRESENTATIONS IN BOLLYWOOD

Representation of sexual imagery in Bollywood continues to change with shifting boundaries of sexual attitudes and, especially, conceptions of femininity and masculinity.

In the pre-liberalised era of 1950-70s, Bollywood films portrayed women as idealised sexual objects, existing primarily for the male gaze. The main focus of sexual attitudes and behaviour in Bollywood has largely been centered around male pleasure, often portraying sexuality as an instrument of control over female bodies. As depiction of female desires and exploration of female fantasies became more mainstream, scholars like Kaur have argued that early 1970s-2000s era featured transformative conceptions of eroticism with songs like Baahon Mein Chale Aa and Zara Zara wherein female voices suggested a subtle openness to sexual comfort. The era of Liberalisation brought changes to the way femininity, eroticism and desire was pictured in Bollywood films. Due to globalisation, Bollywood underwent an evolution to cater to the changing tastes of a cosmopolitan audience. The 'new woman' archetype marked by ambition, independence, and assertiveness took over Bollywood films. Scholars like Nijhawan argue that this evolution also marked a departure from the early notions of suppressing desire.

CONCLUSION

The existing sexual attitudes in Interestingly, the portrayal of female sexual desire did not necessarily go through a positive change as films like *Aitraaz* and *Murder* continued to scrutinise sexuality as an instrument of manipulation and control, whilst also antagonising female promiscuity. This shows a contradiction within post-liberalisation cinema. This conception however has not been so uniform in non-mainstream films which make an effort to challenge traditional notions of desire and redefine the unwritten complexities of sexual desire. Alankita Srivastava's *Lipstick Under My Burkha* presents a story of four distinct female characters with their different struggles to overcome subaltern conditions and achieve emancipation from male discourse. The film deals extensively with the societal challenges that come with accepting one's sexual identity and desire as a woman. It attempts to tackle the mainstream Bollywood perception of sexual vigour as a key definer of hypermasculinity and puts female sexual desire to the forefront. Similarly, the popular two part Netflix series *Lust Stories* attempts to deal with desire in ways that rethink the importance of female pleasure at a societal level. Yet, these projects face the scrutiny of male gaze perspectives, given the film industry's history of objectification of the female body. The prevalence of male gaze in Bollywood highlights societal sexual behaviours and the perception of female sexed bodies

Cinematic representation and conceptualisation of sexual desire in Bollywood shifts and shapes itself through religious, traditional, cultural, as well as socio-political landscapes of the nation. Over time, Bollywood has been subjected to a transformative evolution of sexuality such that it is met with a diversification of ideas on sex, female desire, and eroticism as a whole. The coming of OTT platforms have further embraced this change as watching films gets redefined as a private act, giving more leeway to filmmakers when it comes to portrayal of profanity as well as sexual desire. The further departure of censorship certificates creates space for creative freedom which otherwise would be undermined due to adherence to social acceptance and politics of the state.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CLUSTER

BEYOND EUROCENTRIC UNIVERSALITY: RECLAIMING AGENCY OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND INDIGENOUS GROUPS THROUGH EPISTEMIC PLURALISM



INTRODUCTION

Knowledge plays a major role in shaping how global politics is understood, governed and transformed. In International Relations, knowledge is structured through a hegemonic framework creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion due to which knowledge of dominant groups are treated as universal and the subordinate groups are reduced to objects of this knowledge. The idea that Eurocentric knowledge is the central axis of discourse leads to certain forms of knowledge being naturalized and normalized. A major assumption of Eurocentric thought is that European history is treated as universal serving as a model through which the rest of the world is evaluated regardless of the context. This epistemic hierarchy affects areas far beyond academia. Knowledge production structures global governances, functioning of international institutions and development. It not only defines what counts as legitimate and natural but also defines and picks which problems are identified and the manner in which they are dealt with. This coloniality of knowledge is situated in specific locations within hierarchies of gender, class, race and sex that deem the West as superior leading to global power structures having remnants of colonialism and re-inscribing contemporary global inequalities. This Eurocentric framework leads to rejection of knowledge from the Global South and Indigenous groups. This paper argues that Eurocentric knowledge production that is institutionalized in IR through international institutions and policies leads to marginalization of knowledge from the Global South and this requires a shift by situating Western knowledge as one epistemic tradition among many rather than letting it constitutes as a universal benchmark thereby decolonizing knowledge and creating an inclusive global order.

COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE MYTH OF EUROCENTRIC UNIVERSALITY

The founding concepts of IR are rooted in Eurocentric knowledge and thinking that came about after colonialism and imperialism. Western knowledge provides an ideal template to which all other nations are required to follow as it presents itself detached from context, history and power though filled with European experience. Non-Western knowledge is often reformulated to fit Western ontological categories, stripping it of its original context. This lies in Western knowledge's claim to universality. This consequent concentration of knowledge production coming from Western academic institutions strengthens this single axis formation and claim for universalism. The global production of knowledge being Eurocentric leads to alignment of rationality, science and modernity with European principles while marking non-European knowledge as inferior or outdated.

This is clearly depicted in the case of Human Rights Framework, where individual rights assumes an individual mainly has rights such as freedom of speech, religion and privacy framing them as individual entitlements and marginalizing that Global South societies where land is collectively owned, identity is subjective based on tribe or clan and duties remain as important as right like in the Adivasi communities.

Therefore, the result of this epistemic ordering leads to naturalizing Western principles and history reframing global inequalities as internal failure of Global South rather than looking at it as outcomes of colonial exploitation. Indigenous principles that are grounded in ecology and collective community knowledge are dismissed as they do not stem from ideas of Western thought.

EUROCENTRIC ASSUMPTION OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION DISTORTING GLOBAL ORDER

The coloniality of knowledge becomes a global problem when the Eurocentric assumptions that all societies lie on the same path of one development trajectory culminating in Western modernity are the underlying principles followed in global governance and by international institutions. In International Relations, Third World countries and the Global South are not allowed to exert agency although the new states were independent according to International Law. Creation of binary categories in the global order such as West and East, Center and periphery and first and third world reinforce global difference through simplification making the West embody "great tradition" while the Global South having "little tradition".

Gayatri Spivak proposes a notion of strategic essentialism that allows the subaltern to represent themselves based on their shared identity that can function as a political strategy to forget the colonial differences that continues to be present in the global order. As the binary differences reflect a continuous denial of diversity present within the international system and a refusal to forget the colonial difference that continues to structure international systems, the economy and academic hierarchies.

TWAIL scholars such as B.S Chimni demonstrate that this Eurocentric logic is institutionalized in international law and governance as international institutions create universal standards derived from Western historical experience while ignoring the situation of the Global South in terms of their uneven development and different political order. Through institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the World Bank, international law enforce the uniform standards that take upon Western models of markets, development and statehood.

COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE MYTH OF EUROCENTRIC UNIVERSALITY

For example, the TRIPS agreement globalizes Western concepts of property thereby forcing Third World states to enforce intellectual property rules that undermine their local knowledge, public health and autonomy. This reproduces a hierarchy in the global order and continues to misrepresent and takes away the agency of the Global South. This depicts that Eurocentric knowledge actively shapes the global order by determining the way International Relations is formed leading to constrain in political imagination and removal of agency of the Global South and indigenous knowledge system.

DISMANTLING THE HIERARCHY THROUGH EPISTEMIC PLURALISM

If Western knowledge has shaped global order by marginalizing the Global South, the question is not one of critique and rejection but reconstruction. Segun Charles Sule argues that political decolonization did not dismantle epistemic domination instead coloniality continues to persist through universalization of European knowledge systems in academia, policymaking and international institutions.

A solution that is meaningful should not just critique the current system but focus on how alternative systems of knowledge can be reintegrated without rejection of Western knowledge. The first step towards epistemic change lies in challenging the assumption that Eurocentric knowledge is universal and applies in all spheres irrespective of the context. Alternative systems of knowledge such as Indigenous Knowledge Systems are not excluded because they lack validity but because they do not follow Western norms and principles.

These systems should be reintroduced in order to reject the idea that there is a single epistemic center that forms the global order. This change would directly affect the way in which international relations and global governance function. Knowledge should be treated as contextual rather than universal, leading to removal of uniform policies across different social and historical contexts. There needs to be a contextual shift in what knowledge is produced and authorized within International Relations. One pathway is epistemic pluralism which holds that no single epistemological tradition can have universal authority in the global order. This does not mean that the current Eurocentric knowledge should be rejected but it requires decentering making it one of the epistemic traditions among many others. Such a change would naturally allow indigenous and Global South knowledge rather than using them merely for data.

This transformation would have many implications for international institutions as policies and bodies would be structured keeping in mind the diverse economic and social arrangements. Such as climate governance that could be reshaped by using indigenous ecological knowledge as a major manner to design environmental policies of the world. Decolonizing International Relations by embracing epistemic pluralism, making it a discipline that recognizes the Global South as a agent playing a major part in the future of global norms, institutions and structures.

CONCLUSION

Eurocentric knowledge continues to shape IR by defining what counts as legitimate and rational knowledge thereby making it universal and leading to Global South knowledge as incomplete and irrational. This hierarchy affects much more beyond academics as it is institutionalized through international law and policies where context is not taken into consideration imposing a uniform standard. The solution requires dismantling the monopoly of Western knowledge and using epistemic pluralism to offer a path for knowledge from the Global South. IR grounded in epistemic pluralism would not only correct colonial differences and to expand the disciplines capacity to respond to challenges in a more diverse manner thereby creating a better functioning global order.

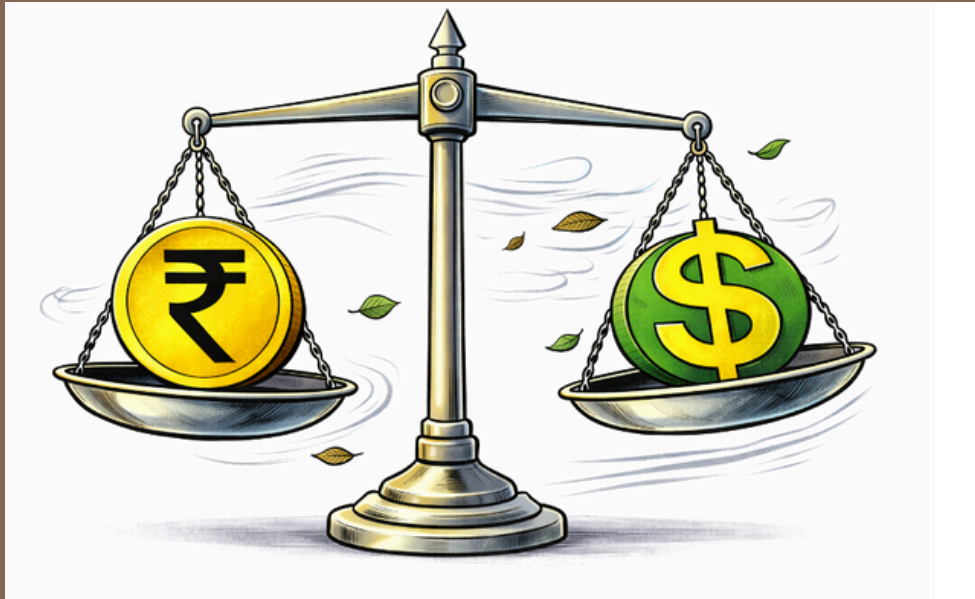
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ECONOMICS AND FINANCE CLUSTER

WHEN THE RUPEE SLIPS BUT THE ECONOMY RUNS



INTRODUCTION

The Indian Rupee has slid to a record low against the U.S. Dollar, breaking the 90 per Dollar mark. The irony is that the Indian economy has been growing throughout this time and is considered as one of the fastest growing economies. This coexistence of growth and currency depreciation is neither unusual nor paradoxical. It simply reflects a classic emerging market pattern where output incomes, and investment rise faster than the rate at which the currency is depreciating. This is driven by a strong domestic demand, which is supported by manageable external balances rather than solely by exchange rates. The Indian economy is worth somewhere around \$4.3 trillion, representing around 3.9% of the world economy.

Despite this growth, the rupee has continued to depreciate throughout 2025. Exchange rate data indicates that the USD/INR averaged around ₹87, while weakening to above ₹90 by December. This depreciation has been attributed primarily to global Dollar strength, higher U.S. rates, and tariffs.

THE DOLLAR ILLUSION

One of the most common pitfalls while analysing exchange rates is evaluating growth solely on dollar denomination. When the rupee weakens, converting the GDP to USD mechanically reduces its nominal Dollar value, even if the actual quantity of goods and services produced increases. This is what economists refer to as the money illusion, or in this case, Dollar Illusion.

Economists increasingly argue that a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted measure offers a more reliable gauge of an economy's real size and living standards rather than the GDP, which estimates are converted at market exchange rates. Market conditions are shaped by forces such as capital flows, interest rates, monetary policies, and shifts in global risk sentiment, rather than relying on domestic productive capacity.

Hence, currency movements can significantly alter an economy's dollar-denominated GDP without reflecting any meaningful change in real output or welfare. This is noticeable in developing economies, where structurally undervalued and volatile currencies tend to understate real economic capacity and distort cross-country comparisons. From a policy perspective, relying on exchange rate-based metrics can therefore lead to misleading assessments of economic strength and living standards. Furthermore, reinforcing the case for PPP based comparisons in development analysis.

PPP-adjusted measure overcomes this limitation by taking into account the differences in domestic price levels and cost of living across countries. Instead of questioning how much an economy is worth at existing exchange rates, the PPP approach asks what amount of goods and services people can purchase within their economy. For example, the prices of non-tradeable goods and services such as housing and healthcare are significantly lower in developing countries, exchange rates tend to understate their real levels. PPP corrects this distortion by valuing output at comparable prices, thereby offering a more accurate basis for comparing living standards and real economic capacity.

WHY GROWTH AND DEPRECIATION CAN COEXIST

It is common to assume that if a country's currency is weakening, its economy must also be weakening. However, economic growth and currency movements measure very different things. Economic growth refers to the increase in the production of goods and services within a country and is measured in real terms after adjusting for inflation. Currency depreciation however only shows how much the domestic currency is worth compared to another currency, such as the USD. As sources make it clear that India's growth has been strong because of domestic demand, investment and output, while the rupee has depreciated against the USD.

A key economic distinction of nominal exchange rate and real purchasing power helps explain the coexistence. The nominal exchange rate tells us how many rupees are needed to buy \$1 instead of being able to calculate how much people can buy with their incomes within India.

What matters for living standards is whether real incomes and productivity are rising faster than prices. The World Bank emphasised that improvements in productivity and domestic activity can raise real income even if currency weakens.

Currency depreciation can coexist with growth because it supports certain parts of the economy. When the rupee weakens, Indian exports become cheaper for foreign buyers, which can increase the demand for services like IT, software, and business outsourcing. Deloitte India noted that rupee depreciation has helped maintain export competitiveness and supported services export while increasing costs of imports.

IS THIS A PROBLEM IN DISGUISE?

If currency depreciation was a signal for economic problems, it would create severe imbalances externally. However, India's external position in 2025 has stayed moderately relative to GDP and has been cushioned by strong services export and remittances. India's external balances allow the rupee to adjust gradually without triggering a balance of payments crisis.

India's current account deficit narrowed to 0.6% of GDP in FY25, and is driven by a substantial service trade surplus of \$188.8 billion, therefore strengthening the country's external position. This resilience has given the RBI greater autonomy in setting monetary policies, which enable prioritising domestic economic conditions. The December cut on repo rate to 5.25% reflects a strategic choice to support growth rather than defend the rupee's exchange level. In effect, the RBI has used exchange rate flexibility as a buffer against external shocks while supporting accommodative monetary conditions.

The rupee's changing value has uneven effects throughout the economy. When the rupee weakens, exporters are usually the first beneficiaries. A weaker rupee means that Indian goods and services become cheaper for foreign buyers, making them more competitive in global markets. IT companies, software exports and pharmaceuticals are few of the many who benefit from this since they earn in dollars while meeting expenses in rupees. Additionally, households receiving remittances from abroad benefit from this. When dollars or other foreign currencies are converted into rupees, a weaker rupee means more money.

Data shows that India's leading merchandise exports in November 2025 included engineering goods worth \$11.01 billion, electronic goods worth \$4.81 billion, and pharmaceuticals up 21%. These gains reflect how depreciation in currency makes Indian goods cheaper for foreign buyers.

CONCLUSION

However, there do exist some losers when the currency depreciates, mainly those who are dependent on imports. On the import side, petroleum fuel and oil account for around 31.4% of India's total imports, precious metals at 11.9% and machinery at 8.8%. when the rupee weakens, these dollar priced imports become costlier, therefore raising domestic inflation on fuel, electronics, and other products. Another group which comes under pressure would be those companies with foreign currency debt. Firms that have borrowed in dollars must repay more rupees when the currency weakens, increasing their financial burden.

In the long run, rupee depreciation can support growth only if it is accompanied by structural gains in export competitiveness and a sustained reduction in import dependence. The government's PLI framework is intended to expand domestic manufacturing capacity and reduce reliance on imported machinery and intermediate goods. Persistent depreciation, however, risks locking in higher imported inflation and eroding external balances rather than strengthening them. The RBI's balance of accommodating monetary policy with exchange rate flexibility reflects a deliberate policy trade-off, supporting domestic growth while holding inflation risks and safeguarding external stability.

India's experience in 2025 shows that a weakening currency and strong economic growth are not mutually exclusive. The rupee's depreciation reflects global financial conditions and structural trade realities, rather than a collapse in domestic fundamentals. At the same time, real output, investment, and income have continued to expand, therefore driven by domestic demand and supported by manageable external balances.

Exchange rates capture relative prices, instead of welfare, productivity, and the direction of structural change within an economy. While currency depreciation creates clear distributional effects, it helps exporters while raising costs for importers. The more important question is not how strong the rupee is against the dollar, rather where real incomes and economic resilience are improving overtime. On that measure, India's growth in 2025 stays intact.

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GENDER AND SOCIETY CLUSTER

THE POLITICS WRITTEN ON SKIN: RECLAIMING BODILY AUTONOMY AS FEMINIST POLITICS



UNDERSTANDING BODILY AUTONOMY

Bodily autonomy refers to the right and ability conferred to an individual to make uncoerced and educated choices with regards to their body. These choices include decisions related to reproduction, health, sexuality, labour, gender expression, and movement. Judith Butler argues, bodies are not mere biological entities; instead, they are constructed socially and politically. Hence, it is difficult to separate bodily autonomy and the power structures that govern and define the bodies that are regulated and the bodies that are respected. Hence, bodily autonomy cannot be understood in isolation from the power structures that govern it. These frameworks not only govern but also define which bodies ought to be respected and which ones are subjected to regulation.

It is no news that women's bodies have often been treated as sites of politics and social meaning rather than spaces of personal sovereignty. The global patriarchal order has long been upheld by mechanisms that impose control over women's bodies, whether through norms of fertility or those of modesty and respectability. As a result, bodily autonomy gained the role of not just a personal right but that of a political assertion of agency, which challenges the very systems that deny women full subjecthood.

GENDER, POWER, AND THE REGULATION OF BODIES

Gender is a key actor in the determination of the governing of bodies. Women are conditioned via the means of social norms and expectations to create feelings about how to view their bodies. This is done through monitored behaviour, moral policing, and impositions on their choice of clothing. These norms find their way into women's lives in the form of family pressure and social stigma in the informal realm, while in the formal realm, they come in the shape of institutions like law and education. Foucault argues that modern power operates through discipline and normalisation just as much as it does through force, therefore producing "docile bodies" that internalise regulation.

Certain bodies face disproportionate subjection to this disciplinary power. Women's bodies constantly require themselves to justify their bodily presence. This force can be noticed in the deep-seated notions of every institution that the bodies interact with, from moral policing in public spaces to dress codes in educational institutions.

Gender minorities are subjected to even more scrutiny, as their bodies challenge the frameworks that set up heterosexual and binary norms. Therefore, gender hierarchies are reinforced by the regulation of bodies while appearing neutral or culturally justified.

REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY AND MORAL POLICING

One of the most contested dimensions of bodily autonomy is reproductive autonomy. Moral, religious, or nationalist arguments frequently restrict access to contraception, abortion, fertility treatments, and maternal healthcare.

These forms of restriction reflect the belief that women's reproductive capacities serve social or state interests rather than individual choice

Women's bodies are reduced to instruments of demographic management when their reproductive decisions are controlled by the state. Marginalized women, who are already faced with barriers to healthcare access and heightened surveillance, are even more disproportionately affected. Reproductive labour, both biological and social, has historically been regulated while being simultaneously devalued. Therefore, reproductive autonomy is inseparable from the broader struggles against structural inequality.

SEXUALITY, CONSENT, AND OWNERSHIP OF THE BODY

Despite being closely linked to bodily autonomy, sexual autonomy is still one of the most regulated facets of women's lives. Feminist theorists point out that consent is frequently influenced by power disparities rather than true freedom, despite the legal emphasis on consent. Social narratives often cast blame on survivors of sexual violence and question women's credibility.

Honor cultures and moral frameworks that associate virtue with physical control also restrict women's sexuality. Because their sexual autonomy is frequently denied legal recognition or social legitimacy, queer and trans people face additional obstacles. These relationships highlight the conditional nature of body ownership, which is bestowed selectively in accordance with conformity to prevailing standards.

MEDICALIZATION AND THE LOSS OF AGENCY

In discussions about bodily autonomy, medical institutions play a complicated role. Healthcare has the capacity to empower people, but it has also been a place of exclusion and control. Gender-affirming care is overly scrutinized, women's suffering is often disregarded, and reproductive choices are questioned. According to Foucault's analysis of medical authority, bodies are no longer sites of agency but rather objects of expertise.

People frequently lose their ability to make decisions as a result of the medicalization of gendered bodies, especially when it comes to mental and reproductive healthcare. The World Health Organization highlights consent, autonomy, and dignity as core values of a rights-based approach to healthcare. In the absence of such a strategy, medicine runs the risk of strengthening the very hierarchies it purports to reduce.

THE STATE, SURVEILLANCE, AND BODILY CONTROL

Through legislation, surveillance, and public policy, the state significantly influences bodily autonomy. The movement and presence of bodies in public areas are governed by identification systems, moral laws, and police tactics. This is because control over one's body is essential to freedom and dignity, in which legal scholars contend that privacy and bodily autonomy are inextricably linked.

Under the pretense of safety or decency, surveillance disproportionately targets women and marginalized genders. These actions reinforce the notion that autonomy must be overseen by turning bodies into places of governance. The state frequently mirrors prevailing power structures rather than opposing them, as feminist legal theory indicates.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND UNEQUAL AUTONOMY

Not everyone experiences bodily autonomy in the same way. Caste, class, race, disability, and citizenship are examples of intersectional factors that significantly influence who can control their body. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality illustrates how marginalized women's bodily vulnerability is exacerbated by overlapping oppressive systems.

In a similar vein, Angela Davis emphasizes how structural and historical injustices restrict the autonomy of working-class and racialized women. Bodily autonomy runs the risk of becoming a privilege for a select few rather than a universal right if these intersections are not addressed.

RECLAIMING BODILY AUTONOMY AS A COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE

Bodily autonomy is frequently framed in today's discourse as a personal decision that each individual must make. But this framing hides the structural prerequisites for autonomy. Due to capitalism depending on disciplined bodies and unpaid reproductive labor, feminist scholars contend that bodily control is fundamental to capitalism itself.

Collective political action, as opposed to individual assertion, is necessary to reclaim bodily autonomy. To confront systems that profit from bodily regulation, feminist movements, queer activism, labor struggles, and calls for accessible healthcare must come together. In this sense, autonomy means changing society rather than withdrawing from it.

CONCLUSION

Bodily autonomy is the pivot upon which the entire question of gender and society turns, showing just how deeply politics is inscribed upon the body. In matters of reproduction and sexuality, in medicine, and in the surveillance of the state, the politics of bodily autonomy is drawn into the contradictions of meaningful liberty in patriarchal and unjust social formations. The defense of bodily autonomy does not simply revolve around individual rights; rather it involves dismantling the societal framework that legitimizes the right to exercise power over another person's body. Thus, the feminist movement toward a future where autonomy is valued within the context of women's lives will also have to be inclusive, intersectional, and focus on social change.

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LEGAL STUDIES CLUSTER

CENTRALISATION THROUGH CODIFICATION: FEDERAL CONCERNS UNDER INDIA'S NEW LABOUR CODE



INTRODUCTION

The traditional nature of labour regulation in India has been based on the federal system of the country, and both the Union and the States are given powers to legislate on the Concurrent List of the Constitution. This division allowed the States to address region-based realities in industries, the labour market, and social conditions, and work within a national system. However, over time, the regime of labour laws in India has become decentralised with many central and state laws, which have been accused of being complex and having overlapping regulations. The Union, in turn, responded with a vigorous codification exercise, bringing together twenty-nine central labour laws into four overall Labour Codes. Although this restructuring has been framed as a reform to simplify and be efficient, there are deeper constitutional aspects to this restructuring. The paper places the Labour Codes in the context of the wider debate on federalism and the question of whether the movement towards uniformity and centralisation is weakening the balance that is envisioned in the Indian model of cooperative federalism.

CODIFICATION AND THE SHIFT TOWARDS CENTRAL CONTROL

The transformation of the labour laws into four major Codes is a critical move towards altering the present regulatory strategy in India, which is based on decentralised plurality, to centralised uniformity. Although consolidation minimises legislative clutter, the labour codes greatly increase the powers of the Union by highly delegating power to make regulations, and have uniform definitions that can be used throughout the States. Policies that permit the Central Government to inform thresholds, exemptions, and conditions of employment permit policy-making without parliamentary review or agreement by the State. In addition, there is also an overriding clause to guarantee the pre-emption of the central norms over the conflicting State laws, and these can only be limited in their reach to experimentalism at the regional level. This is a structural design, which represents a desire to have national economic coherence rather than federal diversity. As a result, codification is not only a simplification exercise but also a substantive procedure by which the legislative authority is re-concentrated to the Centre, which distorts the traditional balance of the federal system in the labour governance.

EROSION OF STATE AUTONOMY UNDER THE LABOUR CODES

The Labour Codes substantively weaken the State autonomy in three different levels, such as legislative, administrative, and policy autonomy, thus rebalancing the federal balance of power regarding labour regulation towards the Centre.

First, the autonomy of States on the legislative level is limited by the standardisation of the substantive labour norms. The centrality of the definition of the term wages and the prescription of national wage floors restrict the capacity of the States to adopt labour standards that accommodate regional differences in the cost of living, sectoral structure, and labour structure.

States previously had a lot of freedom to shape their minimum wage models and the conditions associated with them; the Codes limit this to common statutory norms, which leave less room for States can make their own.

Second, the reorganization of enforcement and regulation systems undermines administrative autonomy. Making the requirements of standing orders and retrenchments stricter narrows down the regulatory maneuvering that the State labour departments customarily used to shield employees in smaller businesses. Moreover, the move towards technology-based, centrally organised inspection mechanisms, as part of the Codes, limits the discretion of local labour authorities in their priorities in inspections, how to respond to regional industrial practices, and how to deal with violations on the ground. This enforcement architecture centralization reduces the role of the States as regulators.

Third, the freedom of policy-making, i.e., the ability of the States to innovate, experiment, or shape labour welfare structures, is seriously compromised. The unification and centralisation of the social security schemes under the Codes puts the policy design and norms creation in the domain of the national level, and the States are essentially restricted to the implementation roles. This minimizes the chances of the States having their own or additional models of labour protection that are local in the economic and social contexts.

Combined, these changes make States no longer autonomous in regulating labour and turn them into implementing agencies of centrally determined labour policy. This kind of result begs serious questions of the constitutional commitments of cooperative federalism and undermines the capacity of States to respond well to various and region-specific labour realities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKERS AND REGIONAL LABOUR MARKETS

The labour codes with their centralisation provide serious implications to the workers, especially in the diverse and largely informal labour markets in India. Equalised thresholds and standardised employment standards can lead to a disproportionate impact on States with greater informality, agrarian workforce, or small-scale industries, where flexibility in regulation has played a highly important role in the past. Less State discretion may undermine locally specific welfare policies and labour protections, particularly of migrant workers, gig workers, and unorganised sector workers. Additionally, the increased compliance levels under the industrial relations law can restrict the collective bargaining and the grievance redressal avenue of the smaller establishments. The Codes have the effect of marginalising the regional labour realities by focusing on national uniformity and reforms favourable to investments. This also casts doubt on the fact that centralised codification can actually undermine instead of enhancing substantive labour protection in diverse economic and social contexts.

CONCLUSION

The codification of the labour laws in India is a great structural amendment with far-reaching constitutional consequences. As much as the goal of simplification and regulatory coherence is valid and needed, the Labour Codes show the evident tendency of shifting towards centralisation, which disrupts the federal equilibrium as the Constitution was meant to be. The Codes threaten to destroy cooperative federalism and regional responsiveness by limiting State legislative discretion and increasing the power of the Union via delegated legislation. This essay claims that homogeneity should not be achieved at the expense of State autonomy and the protection of workers. It is necessary to have a recalibrated strategy, i.e., one that accommodates the innovation by States within the harmonised national framework so that labour law reform can be constitutionally sound, democratically answerable, and responsive to the multi-faceted labour realities in India.

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