

REDEFINING DECOLONIALITY: INDIA'S STRUGGLE BEYOND WESTERN LIBERAL PARADIGM

"Decoloniality promotes pluriversality as a universal option, which means that what 'should be' universal is in fact pluriversal, and not a single totality." -Walter D. Mignolo

As the world rapidly undergoes shifts in global power and knowledge production, what lies ahead of us is a question of great importance. A question about who shapes political thought and frameworks and how it will be bringing the contemporary global order into play for integration into complex global governance systems. This is especially pressing in South Asia, where the Western liberal political theory continues to dominate the academic curricula, governance as well as popular imagination despite having suffered from centuries of colonial exploitation, cultural and economic eradication and assertion of indigenous identities. This article, thereby interrogates why the field of Political Science when studied in South Asia in general and India, in particular largely revolves around the Western notion of political theory, the colonial legacies still embedded within modern institutions that exist today, and why India's contemporary political bipolarity still mirrors those colonial structures rather than marking a move towards the genuine notion of decoloniality. Finally, it reflects on India's decolonial initiatives and what authentic decoloniality must embody for India's future.

-Pia Chopra

B.A.(H) Political Science, III Year
piachopra27@gmail.com

WESTERN POLITICAL THEORY'S DOMINANCE IN SOUTH ASIAN ACADEMIA: A LEGACY OF COLONIAL EPISTEMIC CONTROL

What comes to your mind first when you study socialist institutions and systems? Karl Marx and Hegel, right? These are some widely regarded thinkers in the field that a lot of Indians come across when studying Political Theory but, did you know that in Ancient India, the concept of materialism existed way before that. The ancient Indian Lokayata or Carvaka philosophy, which predates the common era, was a materialist tradition that focused on the material world and was associated with a more secular, rational, and science-oriented outlook. Some scholars, such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, have suggested that the "proto-materialism" in pre-Vedic and early Vedic traditions of collective labor and life had some parallels to the Marxist concept of primitive communism, existing before the rise of private property and the state, though it was not "socialism"

entirely in the modern sense, it shows the similarities regarding this concept in the indigenous discourse.

This striking paradox in Indian political education is thus, the disproportionate emphasis on Western political theorists such as Locke, Rousseau, Marx and Weber as compared to indigenous political thinkers. Unsurprisingly, this paradox also extends to higher educational institutions like Delhi University, where courses on ancient and medieval Indian political thought exist but remain limited to mainstream figures like Kautilya, Swami Vivekananda or Mahatma Gandhi, thereby, sidelining subaltern, heterodox and even the marginalized voices of the diverse yet under appreciated Indian political discourse. This situation is a direct continuation of coloniality further encouraging the colonial imposition not only of political domination but also of systematic epistemic frameworks that define legitimate knowledge. Renowned scholar Aníbal Quijano coined the term “coloniality of power” in order to describe how colonial structures persist in shaping knowledge and power hierarchies globally. This epistemic domination therefore conditions South Asian academia to prioritize European thought as the global benchmark, often at the cost of rich indigenous intellectual traditions and their lived realities.

Consequently, generations of Indian students and scholars are predominantly habituated to view Political Science through Western lenses, making it difficult to imagine political theory otherwise or through a third-person lens. This Eurocentric curriculum thus, reproduces

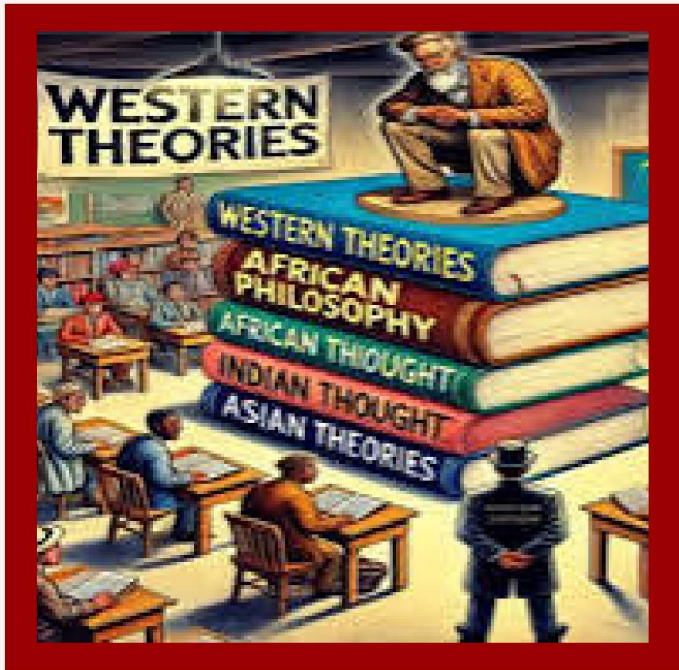
colonial legacies by implying that valid political theory must conform to Western liberal epistemologies, which undermines independent decolonial scholarly practices.

POLITICAL COMPASS AND THE PERSISTENCE OF COLONIAL POWER STRUCTURES

It is fundamentally known that nothing in Political Science is straightforward or simply “right or wrong.” This vagueness is sometimes also amounted to major political notions and ideologies that term themselves as either being “right-leaning or left-leaning.” But, here is where the concept of the Political Compass comes up. The idea of this Political Compass lies in its universality. Essentially seen as a test for all of the political democracies all over the world despite the differences that exist in their governance systems. It was found by Wilhelm Reich, Hans Eysenck and Theodor Adorno who are credited with having done ground-breaking work in this field. Researchers in this field believe that in an age of diminishing ideology, The Political Compass would help a new generation in particular regarding where they stand politically and the sort of political company they are around or plan to keep.

Thus, their essential point has always been that the “left and right” are essentially just a measure of economics in the broader sense. This division also results in a bit of blurring amongst the mainstream parties that more often than not, dilutes the voices of the

neo-liberal capitalism, pluralism and critical dissent.



COLONIAL CARTOGRAPHY AND EPISTEMIC IMPERIALISM: REINSCRIBING CONTROL THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

Decolonization, both as a concept and a series of actions, extends beyond political theory to symbolic and material practices, including cartography and language. This concept also applies to India's historical and socio-political setup. The colonial political setup there is exemplified by a narrow political compass in which power was tightly held by two poles: British imperialists and a limited class of urban elite collaborators. The majority, especially the rural populations, caste majorities, and minorities were excluded from meaningful participation. Political identities and debates were therefore, constrained within these limited axes which further suppresses the pluralistic political imaginations.

Remarkably, this exclusionary model still persists in contemporary India's democratic politics, where the national political compass remains largely limited to two dominant poles: the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the centrist to center-left Indian National Congress (INC). Both these parties sustain a form of hegemony which focuses on majoritarian and elite-centered discourse that often marginalizes the minority, regional and ideological diversity.

Political Compass for Indian Political Parties

The BJP anchors the right-wing nationalist position, emphasizing Hindu cultural nationalism and a vision rooted in Sanatan (indigenous cultural) ethos, while the Congress represents a more centrist, pluralistic approach, albeit one still constrained by the neoliberal governance models and the residual administrative frameworks. This duopoly, hence, constrains political diversity and debate, limiting India's democratic potential to reflect the otherwise ironical multiplicity of its social fabric.



The continued dominance of two poles in political discourse raises questions about the real progress toward decoloniality. Instead of fostering free political thought and diversity, the postcolonial state appears to perpetuate systems inherited from the colonial rulers that repress the Mercator projection, as designed by Gerardus Mercator in 1569, is arguably the most famous colonial relic in mapping where he deliberately enlarged Europe while shrinking Asian, American and South American landmasses. This cartographic distortion thus, enshrines in European superiority visually and cognitively, conditioning even modern audiences to envision the world through Eurocentric spatial hierarchies. Shockingly enough, we still use the Mercator map since it's known for its navigation and a concept known as "Mercator Projection." It can be thus concluded that as we move away from colonial systems, we truly do not shed light on some of the most basic yet foundational concepts of it that reinforce neo-colonial hierarchies in an already pluralistic world order.

Similarly, Eurocentric terminologies such as "Middle East" impose foreign geographical categories which are inaccurate and thus, erase the indigenous histories and socio-political realities. Renowned Egyptian feminist and writer Dr. Nawal El Saadawi critiques such nomenclature as orientalist constructs that are simply established to serve the imperialist agendas by othering non-Western regions.

These epistemic tools, often visible and normalized thus, played essential roles in legitimizing colonial domination by

constructing hierarchies in knowledge and education that primarily positioned Europe at the apex and colonized peoples as inferior or peripheral. Dismantling such notions and recovering indigenous spatial and linguistic knowledge are thus, fundamental to any genuine project moving towards decoloniality.

INDIA'S RECENT DECOLONIAL EFFORTS: SYMBOLISM, SUBSTANCE, AND CONTRADICTIONS

The dominance of the Indian National Congress (INC) has always been prevalent in our country since times immemorial. The same has been validated by INC's major role in activism and mainstream nationalist movements being one of the torchbearers involved in India's struggle for independence. However, just as major empires don't survive forever, it is the same with the major political parties that carry a legacy with them. The same was seen in the year 2014, when INC lost to Bharatiya Janata Party in the Indian Elections. This led to the start of a new and a very different yet, no less prominent era.

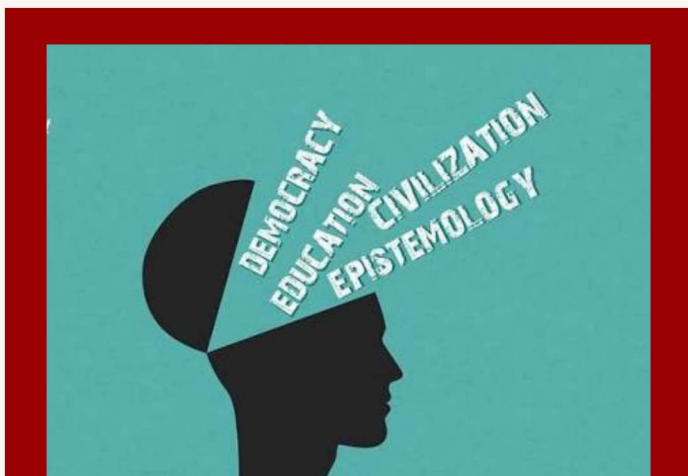
Since 2014, India's government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has embarked on a vision of "cognitive decolonisation," seeking to dismantle colonial legacies and bolster pride in indigenous cultural, historical and institutional identities. This agenda has been operationalized through symbolic renaming and institutional reforms that were aimed at reclaiming Indian

Several examples are present to back this fact. One of the most famous ones is the story of Rajpath, the iconic boulevard that had been associated with British colonial power and was renamed as Kartavya Path in order to emphasize the duty and public ownership of every Indian citizen over colonial entitlement. Similarly, the Indian Navy replaced the colonial-era ensign featuring the Saint George's Cross with a design inspired by the navy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, a historic Indian maritime hero. Statues symbolizing colonial rulers have been replaced with statues of national heroes like Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Cities and landmarks have also been renamed to reflect the indigenous and nationalist narratives such as the renaming of Aurangzeb Road to Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Road. These moves are a part of a broader effort of the government to "remove colonial mindset" and foster a unified Indian identity that is rooted in Sanatan values and heritage according to the BJP. The government's five-point national resolve for a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) explicitly includes eradicating colonial mindsets from culture, governance and institutions.

On the outside, this approach might look patriotic and even pride-inducing for most of the citizens, but when we look closer, we start to see deeper cracks in this well-polished glass-like plan. This approach too, like many others, carries contradictions. While symbolic reclamations are vital steps in decoloniality, they can also be quickly dominated by certain cultural identities thereby, further marginalizing the minorities and their cultures. This push for Hindu-centric rewriting of public spaces and history risks replicating colonial exclusion through majoritarian nationalism. Such strategies not only marginalize minority histories and plural identities within India, but also substitute one form of homogenizing an empire with the other. Critics, thus, argue that this is not a projection of decoloniality but a different form of cultural imperialism domestically.

DEFINING TRUE DECOLONIALITY: BEYOND SYMBOLISM TO EPISTEMIC AND POLITICAL PLURALISM

Had simple changes in the names of roads or buildings to decompress them from their colonial legacies guaranteed India success, we would have already become Viksit in all spheres. But, true decoloniality demands more than just symbolic name changes or occasional and selective historical homage. Rather, it requires a radical transformation of knowledge production, political



Some of the ways in which we could decolonize while also retraining the existence of diverse cultures in our country, we could start with reforming the educational curricula in order to elevate indigenous, subaltern and diverse political theories and histories alongside or beyond Western Frameworks. Another way could be by democratizing political participation so that voices beyond the conventional and dominant discourse gain complete rights and full space in shaping the polity and political systems of the country. Questioning inherited epistemic lenses, including maps, language and institutions in order to reveal and correct their colonial biases can be another way. Lastly, embracing India's plurality of languages, religions and cultures without reducing the complexity to exclusive nationalist narratives can help our country make strides in decoloniality.

Only with the help of such systemic and inclusive changes can our India move beyond the shadows of its colonial past in order to forge a political and intellectual identity which would truly be its own.

CONCLUSION: THE DILEMMA OF DECOLONIALITY

It is imperative for us to understand how deeply embedded the colonial tendencies are embedded in each one of us as citizens that dates back to several generations in our families. We've been symmetrically conditioned, both psychologically and physically, to act in a certain way as a result of years of colonial rule. Therefore, it won't be an easy feat trying to decolonize a country as big and as diverse as India, but it's not impossible.

At this point of time, India stands at crossroads in its long struggle for decoloniality.

The world's power centers are continuously on the move and as India asserts itself geopolitically, it urgently needs to reflect on how colonial legacies still shape its intellectual and political landscape. Such a phenomenon cannot be postponed or ignored.

While the current government has taken strides in order to remove colonial symbols and revive heritage, the larger project of decoloniality is far from being complete. The continued dominance of Western political theory in academia, the narrowing political compass of colonial hierarchies and the restrictive majoritarian rewriting of culture, all indicate that the journey has just begun.

Decoloniality calls for a redefinition of India's political compass to include both radical plurality and epistemic emancipation as a way of breaking away from inherited Western liberal canons toward inclusive and indigenous futures. This transformative project will not only remake Indian scholarship, academic discourse and politics, but would also contribute to remaining a truly multipolar and postcolonial global order in the otherwise unstable power pillars.

RE-GLOBALIZATION: FROM BRAIN DRAIN TO BRAIN GAIN

INTRODUCTION

The surge in immigration-related headlines is a consequence of the unraveling of pro-immigration policies, which, by their very nature, had shaped the liberal character of the globalized world. Be it an Indian, a Mexican, a Russian, an American, an Indonesian, a Briton, a Bolivian, an Egyptian or a Nigerian, every single person and entity in this highly globalized and interconnected world is realizing both the flaws of the core values upon which globalization was built, as well as of the rectifications being done to uproot such values entirely. After all, just as it is quite an ordeal itself for a sapling to sprout into a tree, and even more so when being cut down, the same can be said about immigration in the globalized world. We shall talk about the debate surrounding immigration in a highly-globalized world, and subsequently shifting our focus towards the issue of “Brain Drain” and the concept of “Re-globalization”.

THE GENESIS

This Pandora's Box opened as a still-ongoing global debate unfolded, with governments striving to curb illegal immigration while simultaneously improving the ease of legal immigration. The issue being that the home country often loses most of its bright minds to brain drain in the pursuit of a better lifestyle, be it for higher education, for a better employment opportunity, or as a destination to retire for life.

Sambit Acharya

Political Science Honours , 3rd year
Deshbandhu College, University of Delhi
sambit.acharya2004@gmail.com

The host country is not without its own issues too. Illegal immigrants, often aided by local populations, can pose significant challenges, including concerns related to safety, criminal activities, and illegal cross-border operations, which can jeopardize the social fabric of the host country. Exhibit A of one such situation is the massive influx of illegal immigrants from Asia, especially from South Asian countries in general, who go via the “Donkey-route”, which is a way of bypassing direct immigration to the USA by travelling to Canada and using illegal pathways from the northern borders between the two North American countries. In some instances, such immigrants are, more often than not, responsible for establishing global terrorist networks or facilitating transportation of illicit materials across the oceans.

Migration adds 728,000 to UK population
Total arrivals and net change in UK population in the year to June 2024

