

Introduction: Liberalism and Its Encounters in India

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I. A Map of Indian Theory

It is still a moot question whether there is something called an 'Indian' liberal theory. The term 'Indian' becomes dubious not only because 'India' has been geographically indeterminate but also parts of India, civilizationally, have had strong political sub-cultures (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Islamic etc) (Kulke & Rothermund, 2016, pp. 50–108; see generally on the question of origin of India, Asif, 2020) as well as been part of different empires that have stretched in the West to Greece and in the East to places as further as modern-day Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand (Allen, 2019; Karttunen, 1997; see generally, Pollock, 2009). Moreover, India, because of its central location in a naval trade route that stretched from the Middle East to the far East, witnessed the traffic of different cultures across its land and assimilated different traditions (Subramanian, 1996; see generally, Subrahmanyam, 2005). But still many intellectual and historical accounts of modern-day India take the inescapable, traumatic, and recent event of the Partition between India and Pakistan which happened in 1947, as the politically charged reference point that requires explaining why and how India became a historical entity (Bayly, 2012; Devji, 2013; Jalal, 1985; Pandey, 2001). This is quite natural because after all the one modern-day event which has shaken the political consciousness of the Indian subcontinent in recent times, and still continues to play a major role in local geopolitics, is the event of partition. From a temporal perspective, taking the Partition as the climax of the modern Indian story has the virtue that at least the historical description will be up to date. But on the other hand, a necessary consequence of taking Partition as a major constituting factor in modern political consciousness is that subsequent political theorizations tend to look at themselves as intellectual and sometimes therapeutic exercises to come to terms with this traumatic event in our collective consciousness. If we were able to, counter-factually, raise ourselves above the din of history and look at things *sub specie aeternitatis* then we might realize that the choice of any historical turning point becomes quite arbitrary. In that case, one ought to become indifferent as to whether one takes the Partition or the Sepoy's Mutiny (1857) or the Battle of Plassey (1757) or the First Battle of Panipat (1526) or the Battle of Raichur (1520) or even the mythical defeat of Ravana in the hands of Ram as the start of Indian political consciousness.

But fortunately or unfortunately, we are historically situated finite beings and therefore can't quite bracket out history from our collective consciousness. That probably explains why different people use political history to motivate different political agendas in the present because if it were possible to partake of cosmic time, where the past, present and the future were equi-present (as God would see it), then none of us would feel the need to worry about what we did or what we ought to do in the future. Because of our finitude, beginnings (and endings) have played a necessary role in instituting political narratives. And so, it is the case with Indian liberal theory as well. We take the modern Indian liberal tradition to preoccupy itself with three different kinds of histories. And by histories, we understand a hermeneutic or narrative continuum with minimally a simple internal structure of beginning, middle and an end (the consequences of that 'end' ought to still have current relevance) and an external function of serving a political aim of restructuring current social equations¹. One main narrative, we have already pointed out, is the story of the Partition and the constellation of social and political issues that come out of it. The set of issues and questions which the event of Partition raises occupies itself with are religious harmony, Hindu-Muslim identities, the role of government in curbing inter-religious violence, governmental neutrality and the extent of it, public duties and private rights among other related things.

The other event which has preoccupied modern Indian theory is the colonial encounter with the British. We know that the advent of the British in India though was a gradual process, which took decades, did bring about substantial changes in ways of life of people by infusing 'native' lifeworlds with foreign epistemic and political practices (Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001). This encounter, though different historians would want to place in different points along a temporal axis, has had such a huge impact that we have postcolonial theorists who are still unearthing the subterranean effects of our colonial history. (We use the term 'postcolonial theory' in a very broad sense to mean any theory that deals with the colonial period and imputes imperialist motives to the colonial exercise). Colonialism has been not only a case of political subjugation but also a discursive-normative one. That is, the 'high politics', as Gilmartin would say (Gilmartin, 1998, p.1069), of colonial history would only enumerate the major political and bureaucratic events that happened during the British rule. But this wouldn't include the history from below which, if we take it seriously, would have to catalogue the ways in which British rule

¹ We take our ideas on narrativity and history from Hayden White, 1987. There is an active historiographical tradition which takes issues of narrativity, history and hermeneutics very seriously. For more on this read (Danto, 1985; Ricoeur, 1980)

invaded people's daily routines, affective habits, their goals in life and even how they thought of themselves. Such a history would have to look at people's changing practices and habits as well as what the epistemic changes were that brought about a transformation in worldviews.

Within this postcolonial narrative, very broadly construed, there are obviously different strands and theoretical stances. But one thing that unites them is a revisionary approach to looking at colonial history. Though approaches may overlap, historians and political thinkers of the colonial period in India have completely different and even opposed solutions to deal with the problematic legacies of colonialism. Borrowing from Aakash Singh Rathore (Rathore, 2017), there are two kinds of Indian postcolonial theory -- thin and thick. Thick post-colonial theory wants to re-start the Indian political clock, so to speak, from even before when the British came. To be more exact, the objective is to re-discover India's identity as it might have existed before not only the British but before even the West as a colonial and imperial force was on the horizon (Balagangadhara, 2013; Roover, 2015). Given recent research that has shown that modern liberal theory has borrowed theological assumptions from Christianity (Asad, 2003; Cavanaugh, 2009), the objective of thick political theory is to eschew western methodological assumptions regarding what a good political theory ought to be and what the objectives of a political society are etc. 'Thick' theorists are partly motivated by a deep suspicion of all things western, including their own anthropological and political theories. That is why they want to radically critique western philosophical and political outlook and find autochthonous roots for creating a new 'Indian' political theory. Usually, such accounts look for pre-modern linguistic, political and philosophical tools. Thin postcolonial theory, on the other hand, also critiques modern western theoretical methods harshly but can sometimes be ambivalent towards the possibility that one could have an 'Indian' liberal theory that is tailored only to Indian social and political issues. Some of the thinkers whom we consider non-committal on this issue (Appadurai, 1996; Chatterjee, 1993; Kaviraj, 2010) freely use western theories to buttress their anti-imperial stances. There are some scholars who admit that Indian liberal theory can be generated out of modern Indian intellectual traditions. These scholars use modern Indian thinkers like Gandhi or Tagore (Bilgrami, 2014; Parekh, 1989; Puri, 2015) and their thought as a departure-point for creating new theoretical pathways which would be truly postcolonial because it is argued these were the first people to resist the British forces both intellectually and politically. These people were not only 'freedom fighters' as they are described in school textbooks, but also thinkers in their own right with elaborate ideas as to what kind of a future India should subscribe to. People like Gandhi, Tagore and even Nehru thought of Indian history with its traditions and culture differently and lent their

focus on different things that were Indian. There are enough intellectual resources for modern political theorists to build a liberal theory out of these modern thinkers or so it is argued.

But there are also others, within the post-colonial theoretical paradigm, who think that instead of looking at these thinkers, who were never systematic in their writing and also were also products themselves, in many ways, of the colonial era, we ought to use modern western paradigms like Marxism and left-liberal thought to counter colonial prejudices. We have in mind specifically the subaltern studies group who initially formed an association to bring in western especially Marxist, especially Gramscian (as well as deconstructionist and post-structuralist) theories into the discussion of Indian theory. (Guha & Spivak, 1988). For these thinkers, the faultline between the West and India is not a geographical one. It is not that people of the *geographically determined* West become automatically suspect. For the subaltern studies group, we should encourage ourselves to engage with thought systems that are truly suspicious of western imperial paradigms. It is further argued that with these western thinkers (like Marx, Althusser, Hegel, Derrida etc), one can build a new post-colonial liberal theory which can truly be the starting point for a view on how global politics ought to be run. Given these differences, both kinds of postcolonial theory want to escape the epistemic strictures that have come with a series of global events in the past 250 years or so, which have acquired the name of imperialism. The kinds of issues that matter for postcolonial theory are issues of capitalism, imperialism, relations between religion and state, modern and classical history, role of western political theory versus Indian historical traditions.

The third narrative that has come to occupy modern debates around justice and equality is a critique of social and religious practices. The prophet of that approach is generally considered to be Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and therefore one finds many scholars dealing with issues of caste discrimination, epistemic injustice, social hegemony etc. invoking his political and scholarly work (Omvedt, 2004; Rathore, 2020; Yengde, 2019). This narrative is usually ahistorical in the sense that the main political issues that need dealing with, according to them, can be dealt with adequately by looking at the *present* institutional structures of the modern Indian nation. What requires immediate attention, they say, are social injustices and problems of epistemic violence and inter-subjective mis-recognition. And these problems all have roots that either go back to established religions or imperial subjugation. The Ambedkarites (for want of a better name to call people who critique Indian social life) do feel that history, either colonial or pre-colonial, is

useful only to the extent that it can be a warning sign to show what went wrong and a reminder of things that one ought not to do. New beginnings require new solutions, they feel. The only way in which modern problems can be dealt with is by bringing in new institutions that can set right historical injustice. Thus, these writers are sceptical of history as such and their story usually starts with the Constituent Assembly debates and projects a future India as a nation which will have enough legal infrastructure to handle different kinds of social problems. Some of the key questions and issues that this narrative takes seriously are those of caste, social and historical injustice, modernization, urbanization etc.

Though we have presented the three main narratives that today inform Indian liberal theory, we don't intend to convey the idea that these three narratives don't mutually influence each other. All the issues that we have enumerated as being central to different political theories do have the ability to crossover and with different thinkers of different 'schools' we will always find a *melange* of issues and theories from across the spectrum. What we have done here is to create merely a map so a reader of Indian liberal theory would be able to categorize the different genealogies of different arguments.

II. Current Indian Concerns

If the earlier section was a map of Indian political theory and the state of liberal thought in India at present, in this section we want to look, even if it is briefly, at the ever-shifting normative horizon of what constitutes modern Indian identity. 'Questions of identity,' 'the markers of inclusion,' and 'the framework of social cohesion' have been some of the recurrent thematic concerns of liberal thinkers within India. We want to inquire into the persistence of these concerns in modern political discourse. Why is it that these questions and themes have found not only resonance but also theoretical purchase within the modern political tradition in India? That is the central question motivating this section. This section though might not give a definitive answer to this question hopes to, at least, look at the underlying causes that have given prominence to the debates that have sought to answer this question. We argue that the current constellation of issues around identity, inclusion etc. comes about because of a peculiar 'Indian' inflection given to the 'linguistic turn' that is currently at play within global discourses. By going into this cross-influencing pattern between Indian liberal theory and global 'linguistic' concerns we can possibly explain the current manifestation of political issues. That is, we wish to see if

politics identity via the use of language -- which is a major shareholder in the business of everyday politics in India -- has anything to do with a parallel intellectual movement on a global scale which prioritizes language and its intersubjective rules as the condition of sociality and normative identity.

The linguistic turn that we are referring to, though cannot be accurately dated, points to certain paradigm shifts that socio-political thinkers took especially after the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan on the continent and Richard Rorty, John Austin in the Anglo-American world. Currently, whether it is work on feminist philosophy (Benhabib, 1992; Butler, 2004; Irigaray, 2016) or deliberative democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 1997) or communicative action theory (Habermas, 1987; Habermas, 1998), there is an importance given to language as the constituting force of both agency as well as political obligation which is unparalleled in intellectual history. Without going into the philosophical underpinnings of this linguistic turn, we want to share, for the purposes of furthering our discussion, two characteristics of this global theoretical turn. Before we do so, we want to make our stance clearer. We talk of discursive theories not as a purely creative exercise of isolated thinkers and philosophers but as the emergent, crystallized interpretive responses to 'facts on the ground.' That is, theories though are normative exercises by individuals and possibly academic schools, we see them as a formalized articulation of a *Zeitgeist* that sweeps peoples and periods. After all, one of the main purposes of intellectual history is to unravel the underlying social realities through the mapping of intellectual positions and philosophical schools.

The two features of current political theory, after the linguistic turn, which are actually in tension with each other, can be articulated thus: On the one hand, language is considered to have a world-disclosing ability. That is, the possession of language by a community is able to give the people in that community a world-view which is more or less total. Through the possession of a common language, the rules of intersubjective engagement and the significative moves that people of a culture make can be recognized by the members of that lifeworld. These rules of signification, broadly construed, can thereby help people *belong* to a community. The affective states of friendship, family, religion etc are all considered to be a natural consequence of growing up together and learning the same language. But on the other hand, it is language itself through which people have to find context-transcending principles of social coordination and tolerance.

Common laws themselves are articulated through a language which ought to be publicly recognizable and communicatively exchangeable. A feature of such legislative language is to find common lexical principles which would act as the minimal condition of political obligation. Now this feature of universalistic legal language we can see is in some tension with the natural recognitive concepts that people use to transact social exchanges on a daily basis.

This tension has been brought well to the fore by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book *Cosmopolitanism*, where he talks about how the language of social practices and cultural obligations can sometimes go against not only other cultural practices and languages but can present a serious problem for the modern ‘cosmopolitan’ citizen (we say cosmopolitan citizen even at the risk of it being pleonastic because the word ‘cosmopolitan’ already means world-citizen. But we have found such usages common so we are going by that convention) who feels she has “obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship.” (Appiah, 2006, p. 14). That is, she thinks it is her duty to be motivated by concern for the impersonal other while at the same time, she wants to “take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us), they often have the right to go their own way. As we’ll see, there will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash. There’s a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.” (Appiah, 2006, p. 14). This is the genre of clash we see in the Indian political landscape time and again.

This challenge is expressed most starkly by Jeff Spinner-Halev who presents the modern liberal problem as that of reconciling different ‘exclusivist’ languages with each other. The problem is this: “what happens if religious people speak publicly in their own exclusive, sectarian language about public matters? Some worry that doing so will exclude others from public discussions. Sectarian languages should not be used in public since they are only spoken by a segment of the population. What is needed, some liberals argue, is a public language that is accessible to all, one

that is based on reason instead of narrow sectarian languages.” (Spinner-Halev, 2000, p. 142) Though we don’t have the space here to go into whether a liberal solution is right or wrong, what we can see from what people like Appiah and Spinner-Halev are talking about is the modern ‘linguistic’ problem of finding a universal vocabulary which is while universally recognized can be contextually rich at the same time.

Political disputes come through the disconnect in the vocabulary that people use to understand their aims and purposes. And in modern Indian political history, this tension has been a fecund source of theorizations and interpretations. This tension between the language of transparent motivation within cultures and the lexical rules of obligation has created the question of how to solve social injustice which is historically conditioned, with a language of law (especially colonial law) which speaks literally in a different language (English) and has been produced in a different context (England, the West) as a framework for universal concepts. It is this dilemma which has also produced in modern-day India the see-sawing of political debate between linguistic sub-nationality (Ramaswamy, 1997) and national integrity. Whether we need linguistic sub-nations or a national unity with one language of law is still a moot point with many people. Again, the tension between oral and written forms of cultural communication is also an expression of the modern ‘linguistic’ situation we find ourselves in. The centrality of the language is seen in cultural debates around issues of whether cultural codification as written rules changed the contours of how cultural and educational practices were performed (Srinivasan, 2019; Subramanian, 2011) Did the writing of rules for cultural practice reproduce the colonial logic of subjugation? Do we need therefore to ‘go back’ to oral forms of cultural production to find the originary sources of social belonging? These are some of the questions which now, within Indian socio-political theory, find discussants. But importantly, language has also created a space for an affective longing in people. Modern literary movements within India from diasporic writing (examples: Jhumpa Lahiri, Hari Kunzru, etc) onwards, has showcased people wrestling with themes of home and away, belonging and alienation, modernity and community, usually with tropes of travel in space or time. In most diasporic writing, the protagonist at some point finds himself or herself either traveling to the West or to India. Today, even if indigenous writing both in the vernacular and in English have flourished in number, the problem of finding the right ‘voice’ still continues to haunt cultural expression. This only goes to show the importance that language and its politics still plays in postcolonial India.

III. Habitation of Liberalism: Friendship and Allied Ingredients

Let us now step back from contemporary India, to be able to join some of the dots through which current liberal formation could have emerged. If liberalism was imported from Europe into India through the multitude of ideological formations that accompanied colonization, the question remains: how was it administered to the Indian subject? How did the Indian subject receive and inhabit it? E . M. Forster ends the novel *A Passage to India* (1924) with a haunting comment about the impossibility of friendship between Aziz and his British friend, Fielding:

"Who do you want instead of the English? The Japanese?" jeered Fielding, drawing rein. "No, the Afghans. My own ancestors." "Oh, your Hindu friends will like that, won't they?" "It will be arranged a conference of Oriental statesmen." "It will indeed be arranged." "Old story of 'We will rob every man and rape every woman from Peshawar to Calcutta,' I suppose, which you get some nobody to repeat and then quote every week in the Pioneer in order to frighten us into retaining you! We know!" Still he couldn't quite fit in Afghans at Mau and, finding he was in a corner, made his horse rear again until he remembered that he had, or ought to have, a mother-land. Then he shouted: "India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last corner to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the Holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps! Fielding mocked again. And Aziz in an awful rage danced this way and that, not knowing what to do and cried: "Down with the English anyhow. That's certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty-five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea and then " he rode against him furiously "and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends." "Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want." But the horses didn't want it they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there."

On a similar note, it may be pertinent to open this section with a reminiscence of Satyajit Ray's iconic film *Charulata* (1964) based on Rabindranath Tagore's novella *Nashtanirb* (*The Broken Nest*). In the film, the character Bhupati, a landlord and a newspaper publisher, is seen rejoicing at a particular result of the British Parliamentary elections. He throws a party to celebrate, and a certain pride and sportly pleasure is exchanged among him and his landlord associates. This enjoyment at the outcome of British elections, sitting in Calcutta, the colonial capital, and imagining a friendship with the colonial, imperial centre where there exists no possibility of such friendship, is symptomatic of the moment of production of a colonial liberal self. Such imaginary relations between the Indian elite (in this case, Bengali landlords who adopted liberal stances on questions and fashioned themselves as liberal subjects of empire) and the violent and exclusionary imperial centre generated a mode of liberal habitation and production of selves

through such habitation. In consonance with thinkers like Uday S. Mehta (1999) and Karuna Mantena (2010), we are convinced that liberalism and growth in the colonies have a fraught trajectory, torn in many ways from the epicentres of mainstream European liberalism (see also Losurdo, 2014; Sartori 2014; Pitts 2006). This fraught trajectory further wedds itself with the entrenchment of the global logic of capital within the colonies and the generation of colonial market capitalism (see generally Birla 2010). Edmund Burke and Henry Maine whose intellectual biographies are sketched in Mehta's and Mantena's texts are key figures in bringing liberal arguments to bear on the exceptional space - the colony. In Maine's case, there arose a 'culturalist' stance with which the native 'traditional society' was viewed justifying the liberal exception.

In all of this, pockets of liberal alignment arose across the sub-continent in elite, English-educated corners as early as the nineteenth century. There is actually a limited scholarship on liberalism's reception history in late colonial India. One might locate Raja Mohun Roy (see generally, Kopf, 2015) as the first Indian liberal subject of the empire. Lynn Zastoupil shows Raja Ram Mohun Roy emerging on the imperial stage with his liberal claims and through liberal methods of appeal to imperial authority, helping shape a transnational fold of liberalism (Zastoupil, 2010). He is the epicentre of the growth of a Hindu modernity and initiates the rise of a secular Brahmo Samaj, all the while retaining a loyalist friendship to the empire. Severe battle-lines are drawn across the Bengali bhadralok society on issues of women's rights, sati, women's education, and the question of autonomy over the Bengali cultural sphere (Chatterjee, 1993). It is from Sukanya Banerjee that we get a genealogy of imperial subjects who are trying to carve out claims of citizenship within the empire, despite their colonized status, especially by inhabiting the bureaucracy and other professional services (Banerjee, 2010). Banerjee writes (2010, 4-5):

True, citizenship in its guise as a universal rights-bearing category was not formally codified till the drafting of the constitution of an independent India, but the fact of codification alone should not detract from the longer processes—partial, incomplete, flawed, and often futile—through which the languages of citizenship were refracted from at least the late nineteenth century. Bypassing the various ways in which the idea of citizenship was formulated in late-colonial India—often with tangible effect—blunts the efficacy and urgency that the category lent to anticolonial critique; it also overlooks the fact that it was the liberal premise of citizenship that presented itself as a viable mode of self-presentation by racialized colonial subjects well before the envisaging of an autonomous nation-state.

Thinking with Banerjee, we are less concerned with the legal transference history of the category of ‘citizenship’ to colonial subjects at various points. We are, instead, particularly, concerned with the affective response that took on the garb of liberalism to construct a kind of public self (see generally, Benhabib 1992) that all the while wrestled with the contradictions of its own liberal habitation. The terms of citizenship, we argue, are shaped by an emotional leap of faith where one is interpellated into a social and political formation in which one’s exclusion is but obvious. These persons articulating liberalism in their claims to the empire and in shaping public selves, nevertheless, have *not* become ideal poster-boys of the liberal project. They are, in our estimation, marginal figures (often, men who own property), crying out for political centrality of some sort, while grappling with their material status as racialized colonial subjects. This leap of faith often takes the form of friendship in literature as we see in the ending of Forster’s novel *A Passage to India*. These stories of friendship, like the ending passages of the novel, represent aporias that are generated by the travel of the liberal project from Europe to the global ecosystem of colonies. The Bengali *bhadralok* (landed gentry)² emerges as a signpost for such an agent of a larger reception history of liberalism in the colonies. The realm of such agency expands vastly and quickly into the postcolonial era.

IV. Liberalism in the Postcolony

This habitation of liberalism, in the postcolonial afterlife, throws up various scaffoldings of liberal identity that made demands on the postcolonial state in the public sphere for recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 2003; see generally, Galanter & Dhavan, 1992; Baxi, 1991; Kapur & Cossman, 1996, Menon, 2012; Jayal Gopal, 2013; Narrain & Gupta, 2009). Liberalism and its wide reception across social strata opened a window of creative opportunity for various combinations and alliances to arise in the wake of decolonization. Liberalism begins to look very different amidst the cacophonous politico-legal public sphere of postcolonial India (see generally De, 2018). A wide variety of citizen-claimants appear to engage in a confident conversation with the state, especially the judiciary, and stake their claims in the larger political game of liberalism. These ranged from companies that staked their freedom of speech and expression as legal persons (Dhavan, 1986) as also members of vulnerable communities like Muslim women who

² We further find in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s canonical text *Provincializing Europe* an account of other historical habitations through which liberal modernity was being accessed by the *bhadralok* of colonial Calcutta (Chakrabarty 2000; see also Chakrabarty 2002).

asserted their right to maintenance under a liberal framework that recognized codified Muslim personal law (Dhavan, 1987).

The public-private divide became one of the primary habitational strategies for the liberal individual person. In postcolonial India, we witness the faultline of public-private realms along which questions of social and cultural injustice are fought. We also witness the growth of a robustly public realm in which the liberal person confidently asserted claims against socio-economic exploitation and historical disadvantage. The case for reservations in public institutions of education and employment are examples of such public battles. These took on the language of liberalism, although one might argue that the claims themselves are far removed from the original liberal intentions of equality, freedom and dignity that are enshrined in Western political institutions. These were claims that brought upon the state which then had to answer for illiberalisms of the past, and the gross inequity that the present was enmeshed in on account of such historical processes. For example, in the context of the demand for uniform civil code, the right to communitarian governance of laws regarding marriage and inheritance was adopted in the public sphere, to articulate the survival strategies of groups in the liberal political milieu. In such acts of translation from cultural norms into liberal laws, various sleights of hand were enacted. These yielded several unlikely characters in the liberal public sphere as beneficiaries, if not champions, of the Indian iteration of liberalism.

The logic of group rights (Kymlicka, 1995) began to be encompassed in the public arena of state-citizen conversation. The widespread entrenchment of the language of rights and entitlements and various differential entitlements couched in the language of equality came to shape the postcolonial India politico-legal public sphere (Chandra & Majumder, 2013). A series of civic and political movements populated this realm from the 1970s to the 2000s that articulated the rights and entitlements of women, queer persons, Dalits and Other Backward Classes, Adivasis, alongside making generalised liberal claims on the state based on right to freedom of speech, right to information, right to food security, right to compulsory primary public education. An enumeration of these movements is not necessary here. It should suffice to note that the transition to a neoliberal economic model with the opening of foreign direct investment and marketisation of public goods such as key industries, infrastructure, and transport, brought about its own configuration of Indian liberalism. We find in Leena Fernandes' (2006) account of the rise of the arrogant new middle class in India's metropolitan cities a new register of claims and

self-fashioning where the liberal person affirms their location in global flows of capital and attends to realms of being that borrow from such access (see generally Appadurai, 1996). Simultaneously, there grew spaces of exception in India - evidently in the cases of secessionist movements in Kashmir and the northeastern regions, as also internal armed rebellion across the Red Corridor (Chakravarty, 2008). These battle-lines of direct confrontation with the sovereignty of the Indian nation-state (see generally Ghosh & Duschinsky, 2020, on the unleashing of 'hyperlegality' by the Indian state in Kashmir) were solidified even as one witnessed the rise of a middle-class that was most comfortable in protecting its economic privilege that enabled its entry into the revolving door of global capital. While new identities like those of transgender and queer persons begin to be recognized in the legal regime and there is a seeming expansion of the liberal state's reach, the persons who live in vulnerability continue to feel that the technologies of statepower are being used excessively in governing unruly citizens and their ambits of self (Saria, 2019). In this milieu, we come to inhabit our set of essays in this volume. They range from contemplating the liberalism of Ambedkar and Gandhi, the illiberal persistence of religion in the public sphere to visiting the dilemmas posed by the Sabarimala temple entry case.

V. Conclusion

In this Introduction to a set of essays that contemplate India's liberal trajectory, we (Krishnaswamy, a philosopher, and Majumder, an anthropologist) consider with our divergent disciplinary toolkits, a map of Indian theory. As we see it, there have been four problems that have perpetuated a continuous theoretical dialogue within modern India. The four problems are the problem of caste and social injustice, Hindu-Muslim relations, the relevance of colonial institutions and the question of language and its self-assertive politics. The three strands of liberal theory which we talked about in the first section, we situate as intellectual stances to the first four problems. These three kinds of theory have different methodological approaches. There are those that position themselves within western liberal theory, and ones that position themselves in opposition to all western theoretical formulation and want to revive an authentic Indian theoretical corpus, and yet others who want a clean break from the past and formulate theories for a utopian Indian future.

We then considered the impact of such theory upon Indian political concerns, in the act of articulating liberal politics. We further considered the arrival of the liberal apparatus into the

Indian colony and its administration to various Indian subjects, some of whom avowed a camaraderie and friendship with the liberal imperial centre while negotiating their own status as a racialized colonial subject. We then showed a quick history of the postcolonial twists and turns of the actual trajectory of such Indian liberalism in the politico-legal public sphere, which produced new subject formations that took the tenets of liberalism in diverse directions.

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