India's Non-liberal Democracy and the Discourse of Democracy Promotion

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Abstract

Emphasis on democracy in Indian and international perspectives on India's foreign policy has grown over the past decade. Claiming that India is a 'successful' example of a non-Western liberal democracy, these perspectives prescribe a role for India in international democratisation efforts. The keener among these suggests that India must participate in Western-style, or Western initiatives of, democracy promotion. This article offers a critique of these prescriptions. Recent theorisations of India's democratic practices argue that India is a predominantly non-liberal democracy. Drawing upon these theorisations, this article outlines the non-liberal features inherent in the practices of Indian democracy. It also outlines the democratic processes that restrain India's foreign policy from acquiring an other-regarding orientation. Contesting the characterisations of India as a liberal democracy, this article questions the basis on which the calls for India to participate in liberal democracy promotion projects are made.

Democracy has become a key element in India's ongoing redefinition of its image and sense of purpose in world affairs. The linking of Indian democracy with the state's role beyond its borders has gained salience at two levels. Official pronouncements of the state over the past decade have often singled out the 'success' of India's democracy while articulating its obligations and potential contributions to the world. During the same period, a prominent strand of the policy and academic discourses has focused on a more specific relationship between India's democracy and the Indian state's international role. It has, with minor internal

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differences, supported a case for India's involvement in democracy promotion projects.

First, this discourse passes a normative judgement on India's democracy by terming it success. Its measure, the argument goes, is the congealing of India as an economically stable and politically secure sovereign entity from a pool of apparently discordant and diverse units. Second, the discourse describes India as a liberal democracy. Put together, the two claims paint India as the most successful example of liberal democracy in the non-Western world.

This description emphasises the lineage of India's democracy in the theory and practice of liberal democracy in the West. This claim holds significance for the transformations underway in global politics. Apart from lacing India with a distinct identity in the contemporary world—that of the most powerful non-Western liberal democracy—it also projects India as the bridge between the West and the non-West through which Western political values can cross over to the non-Western world and continue to inspire the latter's political destinies. Seen as a successful instance of liberal democracy, India appears a 'natural' partner in Western projects of liberal democracy promotion. First through what has been called the 'power of its example' and then through what is being called for: that as a successful liberal democracy, India's foreign policy must reflect a commitment to promotion of liberal democratic values and that India must join Western political formations in democracy promotion projects.

Democracy promotion does not explicitly figure in the traditional corpus of India's foreign policy. This novelty invites a set of questions about the discourse's understanding of India's democracy and its reading of international political conditions. A fundamental question is why democracy is being considered an important resource for India to conduct its foreign policy. India has been a democracy for over six decades; thus, why is it only in recent times that an attribute which defines its political system and culture is being presented as a resource for guiding India's vision and policies beyond its borders? Was India 'less' of a democracy during the first five decades of its existence? Or was it that the features of Indian democracy during that period did not have anything to recommend to the world? If the answers are not based in the domestic realm, then it is possible that the discourse is anchored in a reading of international politics wherein some form of beneficial and enduring linkage is anticipated between international political conditions and Indian democracy.

A review of this association of Indian democracy with its foreign policy can interrogate either the claim that what has become successful in India is a liberal democracy or the reading of international political conditions on which the linkage between the two is drawn. Focusing on the claim, a sequentiality is built into it: if the argument that India is an example of a successful liberal democracy can be contested, then the prescription that India must participate in the projects of liberal democracy promotion can be effectively problematised. For how can a state promote those values and practices in its foreign policy that have struggled to become effective in its domestic politics?

This article subjects this claim, which is also a normative judgement, to critical scrutiny. It draws attention to major recent theorisations of Indian democracy that argue that although independent India began with a liberal democratic vision, democratisation has led to a substantial undermining of that foundational intent. India's democratic evolution has not followed the lines of Western liberal democracy, and therefore it would be more accurate to understand India as a non-liberal democracy. Drawing upon these theorisations, the article outlines certain critical features of the distinctly non-liberal nature of democratic practices in India. It suggests that Indian democracy is unlikely to become an ideal model for the world because the values espoused by democratic practices in India neither possess universal appeal, nor appear universally applicable. Finally, it outlines the processes through which Indian democracy moderates the state's foreign policy ambition, thus restricting the possibility of democracy promotion becoming an important component of India's engagement with the world.

Contemporary Lineages of the Liberal Democracy Promotion Idea

Some post-Enlightenment states have justified their pursuit of power or its exercise abroad by claiming that their enhanced capabilities would contribute to the general good of the world. The Soviet Union was existentially committed to remaking the world in its own image. For over two centuries, France has remained ideationally committed to universalising the principles of the French Revolution. The dominant trope of Benthamite and Millian Britain was that representative government was crucial to civilising the world. Relying upon the conjugation of liberal and nationalist tendencies, consecrated to some extent by the French and American Revolutions, liberal democracies have justified the pursuit and exercise of power in the name of doing good for the world. If India is considered a liberal democracy, as the proponents of democracy promotion in India and abroad are claiming it is, it appears poised as the ideal baton-carrier that would make the circulation of liberal democratic principles, until now restricted mostly in the West, authentically non-Western, even if not truly global.

What inspires this characterisation of India as a liberal democracy? There is the intuitively plausible answer: the end of the Cold War exposed India's inadequacies while simultaneously making the United States (US) a dominant power with capabilities to exercise prohibitive influence on others. With its options exceedingly narrow, India could either continue feeling wary of the US and suffer more than before, or seek common areas through which a turnaround in relations to India's benefit could become possible. The emphasis on its democratic identity was part of its strategy to build bridges with the US, the liberal nature of whose democracy has influenced its foreign policy during the past century. In this reading, the specific characterisation of India's democracy as liberal could be explained

by the pervasive tendency whereby intellectual and political elites in the non-West interpret political practices at home through categories and concepts of the West. They do this out of the belief that since the political institutions were modelled on Western lines, and since modern Western ideas of politics influenced the legislative and constitutional vision, those categories and concepts remain relevant for understanding the practices too.[1] Similarly, the advocacy for India to participate in Western-led democracy promotion efforts, which follows, apparently, logically from the prior claim of India being a liberal democracy, could be seen as an illustration of how even the policy agendas of non-Western states carry the mark of being emulated from the West.

Though this framework offers a point of departure for analysis, it is inadequate for gathering the complexity of the politics of liberal democracy promotion in which India's international relations now appears ready to be configured. A brief engagement with the normative underpinnings of liberal democracy promotion and its recent trajectory is therefore necessary.

Most accounts favouring liberal democracy promotion emphasise the basic tenets of liberal democracy: a representative and accountable government which derives its legitimacy from free and fair elections based on adult suffrage; institutional separation and specialised articulation of governmental authority; constitutional guarantees for a set of rights and freedoms considered by the liberal tradition to be natural to humans; a political system that acknowledges and accommodates the presence of civil society; and, most importantly, the creation of life conditions in which humans as individuals (rather than humans as groups and communities) are prioritised and encouraged to act upon the world.[2] Proponents of liberal democracy promotion seek to inform or implant political processes around the world that resonate with, emulate, or would ideally adopt, these features.

The conviction that these features of a liberal democracy are universally applicable has roots in the Enlightenment idea of progress represented in the organisation of humanity around universal principles, which could be arrived at through use of reason. This belief in progress, universality and reason was shared by both social and liberal philosophies. Both believed that the Enlightenment's promise of a common humanity was possible and therefore desirable. One claimed the route to get there was to be negotiated by ameliorating conditions of groups; the other reposed faith in the perfectibility of humans, individual by individual. These convictions, held initially within the West, acquired a realistic possibility of travelling outside through global movements of capital first and subsequently through capabilities of stronger states. European imperialism circulated versions of the universal vision across the non-West during the nineteenth century. However, it was the adoption of these convictions by powerful states that allowed social and liberal versions of democracy promotion projects to gain traction. The Soviet Union was engaged in social democracy promotion somewhat before Western liberal democracies acknowledged liberal democracy promotion as an agenda of their collective pursuit.

In contemporary pronouncements, the more familiar term for liberal democracy promotion is 'democracy promotion'—the word liberal is usually not prefixed to it. This tendency, apart from reflecting the triumphalist sense of liberal democrats since the disintegration of the Soviet Union that liberal democracy has become the default template for all existing and new democracies across the world, also implies an equation of democracy with liberal democracy. The prevailing conjuncture may hold the equation, but the philosophical link between liberalism and democracy is not completely natural. Democracy conveys sovereignty of people. Liberalism is a philosophy of structuring life conditions for the overall benefit of individuals. The two cohere tenuously. Democracy is much older than liberalism, which has evolved over the past four centuries. Liberal democracy is only one of the many ways of being democratic. For example, Iran is a functioning non-liberal democracy organised around the philosophy of the Islamic religion.

A non-liberal democracy does not imply illiberal democracy, something the equating of liberal democracy as the only form of democracy suggests. Non-liberal democracies are different from liberal democracies, but this difference does not convey the inferiority of their principles or imply that the practices of such democracies are less insightful for their implications on universal ideas of greater good.

The idea of liberal democracy promotion has carried these unresolved issues during its steady ascent to the top of Western international priorities over the past quarter of a century. It is common for contemporary genealogies of the idea to outline the lengthy US record of putting its foreign policy in service of the promotion and defence of the liberal principles that govern its domestic politics. The aptness of the evidence does not cover its inadequacy, however. For, though American internationalism during much of the twentieth century forms an important element in its lineage, the idea's current influence and effectiveness derives from the advantageous position accrued to liberal democratic values with the waning of the socialist alternative. Francis Fukuyama's claims about liberal democracy having become the endpoint in humanity's movement towards ever better political organisations sought to establish the superiority of liberal democratic values by establishing the inferiority of the social democracy model. The two post-Enlightenment models of attaining a universal community of humanity had competed for over two centuries whose outcome, as judged by historical record itself, favoured liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1992). Fukuyama's Hegelian–Kojèvian formulation invoked the march of history to declare a perpetual victory for liberal democracy. Though this sense of being on the right side of history rarely becomes apparent in formal articulations,[3] it is possible to detect its unacknowledged influence in the optimistic pronouncements of spreading liberal democratic values across the world in the 1990s.

Instructively, the commitment to the idea during this period was shared alike by those who, on the US political spectrum, are known either as liberals or as conservatives. During the 1980s, an influential US group had sought to rework the

nature of American conservatism in the light of the experience of the Reagan presidency. Its reworked philosophy, often called neo-conservatism, proposed aggressive employment of American capabilities to promote the principles of lean government, substantial autonomy to market forces and excessive individualism in the world's democratic regions. Policy expressions of the new conservatism came from initiatives such as the Project for the New American Century. The conservative push on action had to wait, however, as the Republicans were voted out of power with the end of the Cold War.

The liberal enthusiasm, on the other hand, found favour and support from the Clinton Administration. Though relatively less keen on committing its military capabilities to toppling apparently undemocratic regimes, the Clinton Administration set up institutional infrastructure of democracy promotion such as the Community of Democracies, of which India is a founder-member. It was also instrumental in popularising liberal democracy as the only feasible and desirable model of democracy through its support for the reworking of the norms of international relations whereby state sovereignty was presented as an obstacle to ensuring the protection of human rights in the non-Western world. The leading arena from where this shift was sought to be affected was the United Nations, where Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, with an infrastructural attitude to political questions, spearheaded an implied articulation of the ideals of liberal democracy as a template for the world (see Boutros-Ghali 1995; UNSC 1992). The privileging of human rights over state sovereignty as a norm espoused by the West has since resulted in such formulations as the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Princeton Principles on Universal Jurisdiction. The aggressive and unilateralist pursuit of democracy promotion by the Bush Administration, 2001 onwards, retained general optimism for the idea but replaced liberal strategies and principles with conservative ones. This meant that the US-led model of democracy promotion became far more dominant than the institutional approach which was worked upon during the preceding decade.

The bilateral dialogue between India and the US following India's 1998 nuclear tests was distinguished by its emphasis on democratic commonalities between the two countries (Talbott 2004). President Clinton emphasised democracy as the basis for transformation of bilateral relations during his dramatised visit to the subcontinent in 2000. As Clinton tactically noted in his address to a joint session of Indian Parliament: 'India and America are natural allies, two nations conceived in liberty, each finding strength in its diversity, each seeing in the other a reflection of its own aspiration for a more humane and just world' (PIB 2000). The shift from this admiring and lofty tone towards a more specific and seemingly purposeful identification of similarities between the two democracies is detectable since 2004. The new Indian government formed in summer that year was led by a party that, relative to other domestic political formations, possesses greater sympathy for liberal democratic principles. On the other side, criticism from allied and other countries and opposition on the ground had somewhat moderated the aggression of the US's initial unilateralist impulse on democracy promotion.

Though the context and the source of growing proximity between India and the US was cooperation in the fields of defence, trade, technology, civilian nuclear energy, education and agriculture, the emphasis in official pronouncements on the commonality of India and the US as democracies was unusually strong. They were repeatedly identified as 'natural allies' who shared a vision of a just and free world. Almost simultaneous with these developments grew the calls in the West, mostly in the US and Europe, for India to become an active partner in liberal 'democracy promotion'. The characterisation of India as a liberal democracy which shared values and aspirations of the West soon became widespread.

Perspectives on the 'Liberal' and 'Promotable' Nature of Indian Democracy

In highlighting its status of being the 'world largest democracy', Western perspectives presume that values of Indian democracy are similar to, and thus can be shared with, Western liberal democracies and India has much to gain from participating in international democracy promotion efforts (Cartwright 2009: 403–28). The presumption causes these perspectives to suffer from an internal tension: while they exhort in unusual hopefulness that being a democracy, India would, indeed should, partner the West in promoting liberal democracy, they also lament, often agonisingly, that India's commitment to the cause remains largely verbal with little substantial shift in policy and practice. Thus, India's prioritising of its interests over democratic values in the neighbourhood is often noted (e.g., Destradi 2012). Also noted is the absence of a common (Western and Indian) framing of the problem with Iran and agreement over its possible solutions (e.g., Singer 2007).[4]

As opposed to the optimism that characterised calls for democracy promotion in the early 2000s, recent exhortative perspectives betray anxiety. The belief that American capabilities could promote democracy unilaterally was strong at the beginning of the previous decade. Outcomes of military involvements and increasing signs that capabilities and values are more diffused in international politics have caused renewed concerns over the fate of liberal values in world politics and a suspicion that non-liberal powers such as China and Russia, in consonance with regional non-liberal forces such as Syria, Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia, along with irritants such as North Korea, could substantially jeopardise the liberal underpinnings of the post-Cold War international order. The tactical shift to address this anxiety has been the call to major non-Western democracies—Brazil, India and South Africa are often singled out—to *support* new and fledgling democracies. The implication is that these countries must ensure that nascent democracies do not become illiberal or non-liberal.[5] India's actions privileging the principle of national sovereignty over protection of human rights during the Arab Spring has caused the lament and agony of Western commentators to

continue. Within this general tenor, however, European perspectives have often acknowledged, though superficially, the complexities of Indian democracy and outlined their influence on Indian policy and practice (see Faust and Wagner 2010; Kugiel 2012; Wagner 2009).

Official Indian articulations on the subject lack precision, implying either a highly nuanced policy stance or a deliberately ambivalent one. India has avoided denying the suggestion that it is a liberal democracy. Its pronouncements have invoked liberalism as one of the many values—others frequently mentioned are pluralism, inclusiveness, multiculturalism—of its democracy.[6] It concedes that its democratic experience can be useful for the world community, but does not commit to more than assistance in strengthening existing institutions in democratising societies. It shuns participation in regime change and forms of intervention that undermine the sovereign authority of nations. This position agonises those who see in India the potential to be more proactive and interventionist while also encouraging the quaint suggestion that its own democratic consolidation is a form of democracy promotion. Articulations of its senior policy executives similarly profess commitment to principles of democracy and secularism in the neighbourhood and beyond but invoke steadfast pragmatism to explain the moderation that irks democracy promotion enthusiasts (see Menon 2011; Saran 2005).

Indian perspectives on the issue reflect the Western pattern of being articulated mostly by strategists and policy organisations, which affects the range of their arguments. An influential line of thought identifies India as a liberal democracy and cites the in-transition nature of its international vision for the gap between its identity and participation in liberal democracy promotion projects. India's post-Cold War enthusiasm for identifying itself with the Western political and economic values is gradually overtaking past legacies of non-alignment and Third World solidarity. As India balances its values and interests, it draws closer to the Western view of the world (Mohan 2004, 2007). Apart from a surefooted diagnosis of India as a liberal democracy, this narrative fuses analysis with hope to offer bold speculations:

> In the past, India's internal identity as a liberal democracy was in tension with its external image as the leader of the global south against the West. A rising India—with its robust democracy, thriving entrepreneurial capitalism, and expanding global interests—is bound to acquire a new identity as a champion of liberal international order. (Mohan 2010)

Fraternal narratives likewise detect increasing liberal tinge in its neighbourhood policies, but wish India was more assertive. Thus, 'India's regional grand strategy must be based on our belief that what is good for us is also good for our neighbours; in other words, pluralistic political systems, the rule of law, the rights of an individual regardless of religion, sex or ethnicity' (Joshi 2006).

Apart from regular audits of the contemporary Indian record vis-à-vis democracy promotion, some have also tried to read in India's postcolonial history the

evidence of conscious Indian concern for spreading democratic values in the neighbourhood (Muni 2009) or, more ambitiously, the world at large (Bhagavan 2012). These efforts are likely to be helpful in making democracy promotion a part of India's emerging strategic vision (Khilnani et al. 2012). The relative absence of theoretical engagement of the issue, which is the suitable approach to outlining its complexities, is telling. Scholars emphasise the factors which cause India to tread cautiously on the democracy promotion front (e.g., Mallavarapu 2010: 49–61); though even here a scholar notes that 'there is a potential for India to become a beacon for democracy, not only through the power of its example but also *because of the values that it espouses*' (Mehta 2011: 101; emphasis added).

Over the past decade, Indian popular media has reproduced writings of West-based Indian scholars or of Western scholars and writers on India's international relations, which are usually written originally for Western publications. It is an interesting sociology of 'knowledge production' and agenda-setting that has played an important role in popularising liberal doctrines such as R2P while mobilising larger support for it (e.g., Thakur 2011) and reproducing sterilely familiar Western perspectives of countries such as China, Iran and Syria. These perspectives indirectly perpetuate Western images of India among Indian readers while enlisting their support for Western causes such as liberal democracy promotion.

These perspectives, whether engaging India or advocating India's role in liberal democracy promotion, form their notions about the nature of Indian democracy from its constitutional vision, legislative intent and the structure of its governmental institutions. It is difficult to come across meaningful engagements with the political *practices*, and not with formal outlines, that continue to shape the nature and value orientations of Indian democracy. Political practices, as the rest of this article argues, make Indian democracy distinctly non-liberal. These have obvious implications for both the current intellectual perspectives and policy formulations on the role of Indian democracy in world affairs.

Democratic Practice as a Critique of Prevailing Perspectives

The suggestion for India to participate in democracy promotion is contestable from a practical point of view and through theoretical perspectives. From the practical vantage, it can be argued, on the basis of India's recent record, that it cannot participate effectively in democracy promotion efforts in places such as South Asia and West Asia, where the need for democracy appears fairly evident. Furthermore, unresolved conflicts in Kashmir, central India and the northeast, where geopolitics and security concerns have overtaken democratic commitments, dent the moral basis of any Indian involvement in democracy promotion abroad. Some writings invoke technical assistance in procedural and institutional

aspects of democracy, such as conducting elections or training legislators, as examples of democracy promotion. This may pass. However, the critical question of a teleology lurking in institutional dimensions of democracy promotion deserves more attention. For, a feature of a lot of contemporary institution-building efforts is to ensure that the institutions in new democracies approximate those of Western democracies. This has implied, from the 'standard of civilisations' doctrine of nineteenth century international law to the mandates and trusteeship arrangements of the League of Nations and the United Nations respectively, to the emphasis on democracy promotion in contemporary times, a teleological precondition that institutions of governance in non-Western societies must 'match up to', or 'develop to the level' of, the Western institutions to be recognised, according to the spirit of the age, as civilised, sovereign and democratic.

Theoretical critiques of liberal democracy promotion have come from several positions. The Marxist insistence on the social as opposed to the individual as modernity's emancipatory category challenges the liberal assumptions, but replaces the abstract universality of liberalism with its own. Liberal critiques of democracy promotion are rare. The notable among the existing ones points to the tendency of liberal democracies to become imprudent, which leads to aggression and falsifies the democratic peace thesis (Doyle 1986: 1156); or to the absence of a fixed prescription for promoting and implementing liberalism abroad (Hoffmann 1977: 3–26).

Realist criticisms of liberal democracy promotion appear more effective than others. Classical realism of the twentieth century was shaped in opposition to the liberal emphasis on reason-inspired progress of moral precepts and practices in international politics. For Reinhold Niebuhr, the elementary liberal error was the claim that individuals and groups, including nations, are governed by a common standard of morality (2005, especially Chapter IV). E.H. Carr developed this insight into a discipline-defining critique of utopian sensibility that for him characterised liberalism in international politics (2001, especially Chapter 9). In outlining his six principles of political realism, Hans Morgenthau (1973: 4–15) acknowledged the tension between absolute standards of liberal morality and pragmatic constraints necessary for successful political action. Anticipating liberal democracy promotion as it now obtains in the US, Morgenthau's fourth principle argues that universal moral values, such as the pursuit of liberty, cannot be applied to states in their abstract formulation. States are judged by results of their actions and not the universal applicability of their intent. The individual may sacrifice his life in pursuit of a universal idea of justice; the state cannot follow this maxim since to pursue that justice it must risk the lives of those in its care.

A more obvious caution for the US belief that the principles defining its society and political system are one with universally-obtainable principles of organising societies and politics is advanced in the fifth principle. A nation's particular aspirations cannot be identified with moral laws that govern the universe. America,

Morgenthau implied, cannot become a model for the world (see also, Morgenthau 1947). Structural realists, Kenneth Waltz at the forefront, have reiterated the caution, though for different reasons. Whereas classical realists emphasised the tension between individual and group morality, structural realists appear unconcerned about morality. For them, the US is important for international politics because of its overwhelming capabilities, which allow it to influence and determine major outcomes in world affairs. If the US tries to remake the world in its own image, claiming to know better for others, then others see its actions not as cases of misguided good intentions but threatening attempts to disempower and subjugate them. Such actions cause others states to find common grounds and balance American power (Waltz 2008: 345–49). Besides, such actions would mean loss of precious resources when taken on behalf of countries unimportant to the state's interests (Krasner 1992: 44).

Realism appears sufficiently effective and useful to be adopted for critiquing those perspectives that are now advocating a role for India in democracy promotion. But it also has limitations. First, even if the instincts of realist theory may be applicable to all periods of human history, its scholarly form has emerged in opposition to the influence of liberalism and other universalist thought during the twentieth century. Realist perspectives have developed sharpest in the US, because US foreign policy has been explicitly committed to linking its domestic liberal principles with its foreign policy. The implication is that realist criticism would appear most effective in liberal intellectual, political and social contexts. In contrast, the Indian intellectual, social and political contexts, as is argued below, are primarily non-liberal.

Second, Western realist theorising is marked by an ambiguity. With some exceptions, Western realists have been liberals in their philosophical orientation. They accept that liberal democracies are ideal and desirable form of government: '[P]eace has prevailed much more reliably among democratic countries than elsewhere,' Waltz has noted, adding that 'I hope that more countries will become democratic' (2008: 349). They also accept, as Morgenthau does in invoking Kantian absolutes, the validity of universal moral laws as an analytical category internal to realism. They are not averse to conceding, as Stephen Krasner does, that 'normative implications of realism are not necessarily antidemocratic' (1992: 39). Since Western realists only object to the application of liberal democratic principles in international politics by particular nations, it is possible that they would not object if the world became liberal democratic on its own. This distinction between personal philosophical preferences and professional theoretical positions give Western realism, whose theses appear frugally unsentimental, a markedly sentimental feature of being tragic. These features may resonate in their original contexts, but their application to an Indian context is likely to be less effective. Therefore, the most effective critique of the proposals for India's role in liberal democracy promotion would be to show that its practices make Indian democracy predominantly non-liberal.

Theorisations of the Practices of Indian Democracy[7]

Strands of 'illiberality' evident in the functioning of Indian democracy are often highlighted. These include the rising tide of Hindu nationalism, cases of vindictive violence, somewhat unresolved status of the personal and private realms and expressions of regional chauvinistic urges. These intellectual portrayals often serve as preludes to expressions of claimants' normative commitment to liberal democratic principles (e.g., see Zakaria 2003: 105–13). This mode of diagnosis does not acknowledge the deep structures which support these elements of 'illiberality'. Inattention to the sources of these practices, which are unfamiliar from the liberal vantage, perpetuates the diagnostic judgement of their being illiberal. An implication of depicting India as an 'illiberal democracy' is that somehow the 'illiberal' tide can be arrested by application of proper policy. This may maintain only a wishful optimism in liberal quarters. As the following scholars argue, the non-liberality of Indian democracy is structurally embedded. It proliferates through the logic of popular sovereignty or people's right to act upon their life conditions.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta's *The Burden of Democracy* (2003) acknowledges the disfiguring effects of the unbundling of the Indian multitude on the liberal constitutional vision with which many hopes, formed from the experience of Western liberal democracies, were adjoined. Mehta adroitly traces the consequences wrought upon the progressive vision of Indian democracy by the crowding of political expectations, which signifies Indian society's unsettling through democratisation. He points to a process where democratisation, in the absence of adequate economic opportunities and due to persistence of lingering inequalities for which the new political establishment promised a cure, has led not to the disaggregation of population towards the processes of creative individuation, as it came about in Western liberal democracies, but to its consolidation into groups whose excessive expectations of the state paralyse the governmental apparatus.

An overwhelmed but humungous governmental apparatus has led the state's foundational vision to any number of unchecked deviations:

> The experience of democracy in India has opened up numerous points of dissent, new conflicts of values and identities, a permanent antagonism of meaning that leaves its citizens often with an overwhelming sense that Indian society is flying off in many different directions at once and the unity of all reference points seems to vanish. There is what might, at a high level of abstraction, be defined as a commitment to democratic procedures—free elections, free press, basic set of liberal rights such as freedom of expression (often frayed at the edges)—but the point of all these is subject to contending interpretations. (Mehta 2003: 13)

There have emerged a series of democratic practices that hint at the society's ever-fragmenting plunge into distinctly non-universal modes of being. For instance, the politics of self-respect, through which historically oppressed people seek to

have their moral worth recognised by fellow communities of citizens, has generated a culture of competitive debasement of others. Mehta's is a distinct liberal treatise that adopts an agonistic tone to chronicle with rare sophistication Indian democracy's undoing of its foundational liberal intent.

Another notable theorisation of the non-liberal practices of Indian democracy comes from Sudipta Kaviraj. The methodological backdrop to Kaviraj's reading of political practices that constitute Indian democracy is his objection to sensibilities pervading the existing theory of modernity. The existing theory identifies European modernity as representing the true and internally homogenous picture of modernity. Further, it invokes this picture as the template against which non-Western political systems, whose institutional architecture and cultural patterns were historically configured in relation with European modernity, are declared as being less modern, prematurely modern or inferiorly modern. Kaviraj questions the image of European modernity's internal homogeneity, which enables it to pass normative judgements of inferiority on non-Western instances of modernity. More significantly, he questions the diffusionist teleology that the prevailing theory of modernity propagates and argues for its replacement with a theory that holds that modernity embodies a logic of self-differentiation. To argue his case, Kaviraj notes that

> the increasing success of democratic politics in India is giving rise to patterns of political conduct, trends in collective political behaviour, modes of critical thinking, and evaluative judgement that are impossible to fold back into recognisable European forms. The historical extensions of Indian democracy, while undeniably part of India's story of modernity, are tending to take unprecedented paths. (2005: 501)

Indian democracy, Kaviraj posits, may have begun with visional intent that was recognisably modern and liberal in the European or Western sense. But political practices and related structure of thought that inform, and are constituted by, these practices have now gained such proportions that judging them against the experience of Western liberal democracy would prevent us from understanding them on their own terms, for what they really are. Seen from the perspective of the prevailing theory of modernity, these practices would appear immature, backward or inferior versions of 'true' and 'universal' democratic configurations that India, for instance, would achieve in the course of time. If the intellectual and policy elite retain adherence to this perspective, its teleological implication would inform visions and policies that would be antithetical to the generative spirit of these democratic practices. Adopting the revised theory, which holds that modernity is characterised by a logic of self-differentiation, would enable the theorist and the policy elite to overcome the distorting influence of teleology while formulating policy. This would result in the acknowledgement that India's democratic practices are thoroughly modern. Also, that rather than being transitory deviations that would eventually give way to purer form of liberal democracy, these practices are what the theorist and the policymaker must confront.

A key obstacle to acceptance of the revised theory of modernity is the habit, developed through internalisation of the Western experience as theoretical norm, of recognising political practices as modern only when the appearance of the various elements of these practices conform to the sequence of their appearance witnessed in the West. For instance, secularisation and industrialisation preceded democratic consolidation (of both the social and liberal forms) in the West. Indian democracy, on the other hand, has registered robust and incremental gains without such preconditions as industrialisation, secularisation and mass literacy (Kaviraj 2011: 9–23). Dismissing these trends as somehow lesser or inferior versions of modern democracy simply because they do not conform to the Western sequential pattern would mean misrecognising these *different* practices of a modern democracy.

The persistence of democracy without liberalism is a major marker of Indian democracy's nonconformity to Western sequential pattern. Kaviraj claims that Indian democracy has not accepted liberal principles despite the evidence of deep intelligibility of liberal ideals in modern Indian political thought. He attributes it to a weak process of social individuation, or the relative absence of 'the fading conation of community'. Industrialisation and urbanisation, prime instruments for weakening community's hold over individuals, have *modified* rather than *destroyed* the powerful sense of belonging to communities and groups. Thus, as democratic practices took roots a few years after democracy's formal inauguration, the language of rights—a crucial indication of liberal democratic sensibility—began to be more resolutely ensconced in the discourse of the rights of groups and communities rather than of individuals (Kaviraj 2011: 15–16). Political mobilisation of groups and communities has made them a more consequential force in Indian democracy, while the individual's transition as a citizen has been accompanied by only a form of empowerment.

Among the major contemporary theorists of Indian democracy, Partha Chatterjee has been distinctly innovative and insightful. His writings have offered new concepts and categories to account for practices that appear inferior, immature or deviations from the norm when seen through the lenses of normative liberal theory. He has disavowed the Western liberal theoretical framework, citing its increasing irrelevance in the face of amassing evidence of non-liberal, or what he calls postcolonial, democratic practices in India. Chatterjee insists his theorisation of Indian democracy is realistic and non-utopian; it offers coherence to corpulent evidence of democratic practices rather than considering their normative implications. His position is that these democratic practices of *difference*, which appear *unfamiliar* to liberal theory, cannot be seen as the signs of the philosophical immaturity or cultural backwardness of Indian democracy (Chatterjee 2011: xii).

At the heart of Chatterjee's theorisation of Indian democracy is the identification of a distinct domain of political activities, constituted through democratic practices, that he calls *political society*. The uniqueness of this concept can be appreciated by relating it with the familiar linkage between liberal democratic state and civil society. When modern Western states acquired liberal democratic

ideals of equal citizenship and popular sovereignty, it was realised that these ideals could not be meaningfully pursued and sustained only by legislating institutions into existence. These institutions had to be nested into a 'network of norms' called the civil society. The civil society in the West has remained independent of the state but consistent with its laws. It has provided the social base to capitalist liberal democracy.

Expansion of suffrage since the second-half of the nineteenth century introduced mass democracies in the West and it was noted that the category of the citizen was joined by the rising and numerically stronger category of the population. The rise of populations split the formative harmony of liberal democratic theory, where the 'proper' domain of state's activities with reference to people had been citizens alone. Since the states were committed to democratic principles, they could not but employ their resources to meet the expectations—such as security and welfare—of the populations. The social-economic composition of the populations required that they were also governed. From this emerged a set of practices that Michel Foucault has identified as the 'liberal art of government' (2010) and which have subsequently come to be seen as constituting a distinct form of governmentality. Democratisation in the West had produced two categories of the sovereign people—the citizens and the governed.

The emergence, within the liberal democratic states, of the category of the population that had to be governed follows a sequential path whereby democracy precedes the proliferation of the technologies of government. Chatterjee draws attention to the reverse sequence of their appearance in the subcontinent, where the governmental colonial state, unobligated to welfare and security of people but committed rather to their exploitation for its own sustenance, had formed an invasively-sturdy relationship with the people as subjects during the course of the century and half that preceded the emergence of India, Pakistan and Ceylon (on colonial governmentality, see Kalpagam 2000a, 2000b, 2001). Democracy's inauguration obligated the postcolonial state to forge a new relation with former subjects by endowing them with conditions of freedom and equality that popular sovereignty implied. An altered purpose, however, did not mean that the postcolonial Indian state was making a fresh start. In an absurdly ironical and complex attempt, it sought to realise a demanding vision of emancipation for a very large part of humanity with the same legislative and governmental paraphernalia that were earlier employed for subjugating it.

From the liberal democratic vantage that the constitution and much of India's institutional architecture represent, it is reasonably clear that the state's principled intent was (and remains) the conversion of these subjects into rights-bearing citizens. It follows that over six decades of liberal democracy should have created a 'network of norms' or the civil society—a domain distinct from the state and respectful of its laws. If the claims of India being a successful instance of liberal democracy are accurate, then we should find a coherent civil society of law-abiding and rights-bearing citizens whose activities, in that apt sense of the term, help democratic institutions realise at least some of the liberal ideals set

forth at the beginning of the republic. This would mean that Indian democracy is like Western liberal democracies. Moreover, it would also mean that civil society would be the most important—in terms of strategic influence and size of membership—non-statist domain within the state that is recognised by law. Finally, as it is with liberal democracies, it would imply that all visions of politics would be forged through a constitutive interaction between the state and civil society; that their interaction would be the source of the political.

Evidence does not bear out these expectations. In Chatterjee's reading, 'Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state' (2004: 38). These *most of the inhabitants* of India constitute the political society. The process that has led to their emergence is as follows: the technologies of governmentality that had earlier aided the colonial state in exploiting the people by perpetuating their subject-hood were now to be used by the postcolonial state for ensuring people's security and welfare. The postcolonial state owed this obligation to people because it had acquired, for numerous reasons, a democratic identity. Even though the ideational intent and institutional elaboration of the democratic state was liberal constitutional, it lacked material resources to remake the people it now governed, and to whose sovereign will it now pledged its existence, rights-bearing citizens in any substantial sense. The force of democratic aspirations of the people, along with growing complexity of those aspirations over time, made it clear that the state had to govern its people as population, that is, work for their security and welfare, even if it could not convert a majority of them into rights-bearing citizens.

Suffrage compelled the state to govern its population. Over time, it has forged a relationship between the two that is robustly democratic. But it has not reconstituted the population into rights-bearing citizens who constitute the civil society. Rather, the relationship has given rise to a distinctly modern, political and democratic domain of the political society. Chatterjee's leading examples of political society are slum constellations in urban India. The slums exist outside the ambit of state's formal planning and legal approval of organising people's habitation. Their existence challenges the law and tests the endurance of state institutions. Yet, it has been found in a number of instances that municipal authorities provide slums with water connections, sanitation facilities, postal services, schools and health centres. Private or government companies provide them power supply, telephone, gas and cable television connections. Police stations or outposts are frequently established. The state's governmental technologies provide for their welfare and security even if their life conditions do not represent the attributes that support and constitute the civil society. It is a frictional relationship too, and slum residents organise themselves to resist periodic attempts by the municipal corporations to raze new or concrete (*pucca*) constructions, demolish new vendor joints or cut off water supply due to non-payment of bills. The state often accommodates

these digressions of law by reworking the law's ambits or by making exceptions that could be normalised at some stage.

This frictional and oppositional relationship between the state and populations does not endow people with civic sensibilities, which is an attribute of civil society, but creates them into political beings who are more adept at negotiating and surviving the rough and tumble of democratic politics. In other words, this relationship between political society and the state's governmental apparatus, and not the one between the state and civil society, is the proper source of the political in Indian democracy. Chatterjee does not deny the existence of civil society in India. It exists but formally, weakly and insubstantially insofar as its influence on the nature of Indian democracy is concerned. Moreover, retaining it as an analytical category sharpens the strategic importance of political society for understanding Indian democracy.

Chatterjee's formulations seek to revise prevailing ways of seeing non-Western democracies: as illiberal, premature, immature, rude, inferior or something similar indicating the absence or underdevelopment of fully-formed liberal ideals and practices informing Western democracies. His claim of theorising existing democratic practices, as against using liberal theoretical framework to pass judgements of inferiority or immaturity on practices, is rooted in establishing autonomous modes of understanding postcolonial democracy. It allows him to suggest that 'Citizens inhabit the domain of theory, populations the domain of policy' (Chatterjee 2004: 34). Furthermore, if populations and political societies are the proper sites for understanding India's postcolonial democracy, then it is evident that 'Democracy today… is not government of, by and for the people. Rather, it should be seen as the politics of the governed' (Chatterjee 2004: 4). From this follows a claim that is instructive for democracy promotion enthusiasts in India and the West: '[D]emocracy, perhaps in most of the present-day world, cannot be brought into being, or even fought for, in the image of Western democracy as it exists today' (Chatterjee 2011: xi).

An Un-promotable Democracy?

It is evident from these theorisations of the practices of Indian democracy that major markers of liberal democracy in the West—civil society, individuation, consensus over pursuit of political values and a specific sequence of appearance of the elements of democratic constellation—have either been weak or absent in the Indian instance. These theorisations strongly and persuasively suggest that Indian democracy is predominantly non-liberal. They also make it possible to ask if Indian democracy can serve as a model for emulation by other existing and prospective democracies. Does it possess the 'power of example' (Mehta 2011), or 'inspirational power' (Carothers and Youngs 2011: 3) as is being claimed or hoped? It can be reasonably assumed that to be promotable, Indian democracy must espouse values that have universal appeal and are universally

applicable. This part of the article argues that the practices of Indian democracy give little indication of espousing such values.

From the liberal perspective, Indian democracy appears to confront a set of debilitating inequalities that have immense capacity to degrade the physical being and harm the moral worth of humans. However, this would be an inadequate description of the problematic. Democracy in India has confronted a complex structure of organised oppression, which has tenaciously persisted despite political transitions, uneven economic fortunes, schisms of religions and numerous social revolts. It is now becoming apparent that rather than destroying the hierarchy in a linear, even if time consuming, manner, Indian democracy has rearranged it into a system that appears more complex than the one it was initially obligated to destroy.

This rearrangement, a work in progress since the converging of democratic aspirations on the state's resources shows few signs of abating, defies singular characterisation. At a broad level, it has led to consolidation of groups and communities over individuals as a numerically dominant and strategically consequential factor of Indian politics. These modifications of inequalities carry implications for values espoused by Indian democracy. The core political values of justice, freedom and equality that are recorded in the constitution carry unmistakably universal intent. Political mobilisation of the masses as groups and communities in accordance with democratic precepts has, however, significantly undermined their universality. This is illustratable by the fate of the ideal of equality in Indian democracy. Equality, Tocqueville observed in the context of the US and France, was more ardently and enduringly preferred over freedom in Western liberal democracies. While freedom came naturally to people's spirit, the passion for equality was 'ardent, insatiable, incessant, invincible' (Tocqueville 2000: 615–19).

The liberal ideal of equality is premised on the commonality of humans, which accrues from their being born as members of the same species. Each human being is also born with the ability to labour, and to whatever in nature is that labour mixed with becomes her property. Property is crucial for security of well-being, which creates conditions for all members of human species to use their reason such that principles that form the basis of a common humanity could be arrived at.[8] The liberal conception of equality comprises species membership of individuals, the productive use of labour and potential use of reason to realise a common humanity. This ideal of equality is progressive in the sense that it implies a one-directional mobility—a person born free can use her labour to move beyond the social and economic conditions of her birth to attain a level of well-being from where she could reflect upon the goal of a common humanity. The practices of Indian democracy scarcely reflect this liberal ideal of equality.

In the same period that foreign policy analysts have characterised India as a liberal democracy suitable for working as a model for the world, India has witnessed newer versions of struggles for social and economic justice. Groups such as the Marathas in Maharashtra and Jats in Haryana, conventionally considered

dominant in regional social structures, have agitated to be recognised as belonging to the list of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). The Gujjar community in Rajasthan, already recognised as an OBC constituent, has struggled for being re-identified as a Scheduled Tribe (ST). A new category of the most deprived of the deprived Dalits, called the Mahadalits, was created by the government of Bihar in 2007. In Andhra Pradesh, some of the existing communities listed in the Backward Classes (BC) domain are clamouring to be identified as a Most Backward Classes (MBC) constituent.

These are conations of modern communities to be identified as 'backward', 'scheduled' or 'unequal' by the state. They represent communal pursuits of justice under conditions created by democratic freedom of expression and association. Equality for this mode of politics is not an ahistorical, progressive ideal in the liberal sense. It is rather a dynamic value whose conception for the communities depends upon their position relative to each other. Till the Gujjars of Rajasthan felt content with benefits accrued to them with their identity as 'backward', they did not feel the need to be identified as a member of India's STs, a category of communities who are considered by the state to be in more acute need of its social security and welfare resources. The Gujjar community's agitation to be recognised as a ST was inspired by the fear that communities such as the Meena, identified by the state as a ST, were in more advantageous position. The Gujjar community wanted to equal the Meena community, something the latter has strongly opposed for the fear that it would lessen its share of the state's resources.

This illustrates that creating a general equality of conditions does not appear to be the 'ruling passion' (to use Tocqueville's phrase) guiding Indian democracy. From the liberal vantage, this politics would appear a competition among communities for perpetuating mutual inequality. But the more instructive aspect of this politics is that it displays little awareness or inclination for pursuing a universal ideal of equality of all humans. The absence of an external–universal ideal of equality, which is not ideationally alien since it is also enshrined in the constitution, as a reference point also means that the communities engaged in this competitive politics of equalling each other's claims of backwardness remain unconcerned about its consequences.

This disregard for consequences of actions taken in the name of democracy indicates another distinction of Indian democracy that sets it apart from Western liberal democracies. Ideas of justice of these competing communities are primarily influenced by perceptions of deep and immediate past. Politics, as Hannah Arendt emphasised with her usage of the term *vita activa*, is a lived activity (1998: 7–16). Activity implies some form of orientation towards historical time—of past, present or future. The ubiquity of the linkages between these ideas of justice and perceptions of past suggests that Indian democracy, as it is practiced, is primarily oriented towards past, if only to overcome its dragging effect on the present, rather than being mindful of the present to anticipate the future more effectively. This is different from the experience of Western liberal democracies, where, as Tocqueville noted, social and political currents seemed to restlessly anticipate the future.

Mobility at the level of cognition or sense of the self across social milieu and geographical space is another core feature of Western liberal democracies. This aspect too has been borne out by the US experience. In contrast, Indian democracy has caused excessive mobilisation of aspirations without producing relatively robust trends in mobility of the kind experienced in the West. This process is analytically separable from the dragging effects of the past outlined in the previous paragraph.

The availability of opportunities for a person to voluntarily overcome her birth-defined sense of the self characterises mobility at the level of cognition. The practices of Indian democracy have either not encouraged this form of mobility or done it only in a feeble sense. To compensate for the harm inflicted on people for being born in certain contexts, the state associated its compensatory measures with birth in certain contexts. This has had the effect of entrenching one's sense of the self within the contexts of birth—a democratic process noted for reinforcing rather than annihilating caste-based identity. However, the process of entrenchment of the sense of the self with the birth of those people who are not marked out by the state for any compensation is more instructive.

It is helpful for analytical reasons to divide these people, who comprise the 'open' or the 'general' category of groups of individuals in Indian parlance, into two sub-groups. Some among these 'upper caste' groups may prefer to identify themselves with their birth in the respective caste for whatever reasons. There may be others, however, who would want to dissociate their sense of the self from the conditions of their birth. The prevalence of group politics and clamour for competitive equality in claims of backwardness prevent these people from accessing this mobility. A discursive feature of the former is the attribution of the political views and social attitudes of those people from the 'upper caste' groups, who disavow their birth-based identity but disagree with current modes of pursuing social justice, precisely with their birth. A person born in an 'upper caste' group may choose dissociation of her ideas with her birth, but that association is made by others and reinforced on her. This involuntary association becomes effective because of the numerically larger strength of those who seek to enforce it by attribution. This tendency may have given rise to complaints that people who were born and raised unaware about caste practices and distinctions have had to confront it in their adulthood. Thus, caste-based identity gets entrenched if people wish to access the state's welfare and security measures. It is reinforced by others on those who choose to disavow it. On evidence is a condition where choice of mobility, a basic feature of liberal democracy, effectively does not obtain in the workings of Indian democracy. It must be added that absence of mobility at the level of cognition also hampers people's chances of identifying with universal modes of being.

Democratic mobilisation has structured a closed mobility in the social milieu. The operative categories of this tendency are 'forwardness' and 'backwardness'. Mobilisation in the political realm has seen clamour among communities for outperforming each other's claim to backwardness. It would seem logical if this

tendency produced a social effect that reflected a backwardly orientation of political mobilisation. But this does not appear to be the case. The communities who agitate for status of being 'backward' in the eyes of the state are also numerically larger constituents of Indian society. In the social realm, however, their attitudes and living preferences carry distinct marks of 'forwardness'. This process of *sanskritisation* among 'backward' communities, of vigorously emulating and reproducing 'forward' or Brahminical attitudes, constitutes the closed mobility of Indian democracy. It is closed because the simultaneous aspiring for backwardness and forwardness stunts the emergence of a preferred form of mobility; backwardness and forwardness have their advantages which seem difficult to forego.

Physical mobility of persons across geographical space is considered crucial for people to move beyond or grow over the prohibitive circumstances of their birth in a particular space. It is also an important factor in endowing humans with a creative entrepreneurial spirit, which has been a feature of liberal democracies. Such open mobility as democracy has caused in India is characterised by distress and disempowerment. For at least the first five decades of Indian democracy, movement of people to conurbations was strongly marked by features of involuntariness. The phenomenon of north Indians travelling en masse from Mumbai (or Bombay) to their 'native' places during vacations, and the wish among their elders, who would spend decades working in Mumbai's mills, shoe companies, cattle farms and as vehicle drivers, to 'return' to their villages in old age, exemplify this involuntariness. This mobility usually remained limited between a village and city. Besides these, 'development' projects have been a huge reason for mobility of Indians. A callous interpretation of progress as development of big, visible and impressing infrastructure projects has caused displacement of up to 65 million inhabitants since India's independence. With over a million humans displaced annually to give way to development projects during this period, India is the only democracy to displace populations in such numbers. This is mobility under duress and around 80 per cent of it has been experienced by tribals, Dalits and other rural poor (Mukherji 2012). The absence of justifiable property rights, central to liberal democracies, has been cited as one of the reasons for making this scale of mobility under duress possible (Bissell 2009: 62–65).

The consolidation of groups over individuals; absence of the condition of general equality among people; partial, closed or duress-induced mobility; and disempowerment of choice are peculiarities of Indian democracy. These features do not reflect the ideals and experiences of liberal democracies. The *model* of democracy at the beginning of formal independence may or may not have been promotable. Back then, however, few serious proposals came for its promotion beyond India's borders. The current enthusiasm is based on the success of India's democracy as it has evolved through *practice*. It is the *experience* of India's democracy that is considered suitable for application elsewhere. If success and failure are measures to assess democratisation, then India may be a successful democracy. But the implications read of that success appear inaccurate. For any democratic

practice to qualify as universally promotable in the liberal tradition, it must, at least in spirit, resonate with Kant's categorical imperative, which he introduced in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law' (quoted by Korsgaard 1985: 24). The validity of the claim that India is a liberal democracy can be tested by relating the practices of Indian democracy with the categorical imperative.[9]

Indian Democracy's Moderating Influence on Foreign Policy

Democratisation in India has given a non-universal orientation to the political values envisioned at its independence. It also moderates the state's international conduct by limiting the possibilities of an overtly other-regarding foreign policy, which is implied in democracy promotion.

A contrast with the US is helpful. US initiatives of promoting liberal democracy resonate with its domestic politics and the two principal political parties because the American state is founded on those principles. Democracy promotion appears an extension of its foundational values, which have been held to be universally obtainable. The tension between the Indian state's foundational intent, which possesses elements of universality, and its democratic practices, which give universal values such as equality a non-universal orientation, keeps its foreign policy from acquiring an 'other-regarding' motivation, which characterises US foreign policy. The processes undergirding this effect can be outlined.

Unlike the US, India is a non-industrial democracy strongly influenced by a complex socio-cultural context comprising peasants, tribes and other marginal groups. The consolidation of Indian democracy, to which the current descriptions of its 'success' are linked, took place primarily in an agrarian, non-industrial context. Transitions in non-urban India over the past two decades have been swift; yet, peasant, tribal and other subaltern concerns still considerably inform the state's politics. The agrarian cosmology, for example, is structured not by recognition of, or concern for, universal human rights but security of the land. The peasantry's affective association with land extends from tillable agricultural land to national territory. This implies that a foreign policy that appears unrelated to securing national boundaries would fetch opposition or indifference and not enthusiastic approval from the peasantry. As peasants, tribes and other marginal groups of India affect the state's policies, including, though indirectly, its foreign policy, it can be inferred that these groups moderate Indian foreign policy.

The effects economic conditions have on a society's ethical positions do not require iteration here. Democratic consolidation in India has come about in the context of scarcity—primarily of economic capabilities and opportunities—rather than excess. This has caused a self-regarding orientation which is widespread in

society. Though this might appear similar to the self-regarding orientation prominent in western liberal democratic societies such as the US, it is not. Democratic consolidation in the US, especially during the past century, when it became assertive in international politics, took place in a context of excess—of economic capabilities and opportunities. Self-regarding orientation in societies marked by excess contains possibilities of sympathy or keen support, on the part of these societies, for other-regarding attitudes of their governments. This is because in societies marked by excess, self-regarding orientation is developed in relation to possibilities opened by the market. Self-regarding behaviour in the market encourages the chances of bettering economic conditions. Market offers a theoretically-endless possibility of bettering one's economic conditions. If the foreign policy of the government opens new markets in foreign territories, as has been the case with several US instances of democracy promotion, a society organised around self-regarding attitudes may support the state's other-regarding act of promoting democracy.

Scarcity in India creates a different form of linkage between a self-regarding society and a possible other-regarding foreign policy of the state. Indian society has acquired its self-regarding orientation not in relation with the market but in the process of accessing the state's limited resources. It has given this self-regarding orientation a peculiarly-acute intensity. Moreover, it also implies that an other-regarding foreign policy, which appears to employ the state's resources in defence of liberal principles that do not find sufficient resonance in the domestic realm, is likely to be opposed on the ground that it would be a waste of precious limited resources. Indian society does not appear to possess a bleeding heart for liberal ideals.

Finally, it is possible that India's foreign policy *gaze* is, subconsciously, Brahminical rather than liberal or realist. Although this claim cannot be empirically substantiated, it may be useful to probe this possibility. Liberal writings lament that India does not take strong positions against human rights violations including pogroms, semi-organised killings and genocides in undemocratic or illiberal societies. Its seeming indifference to evidently cruel and inhuman actions, witnessed in recent years in Myanmar, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Syria, is often underlined. This position is defended by some and criticised by others for its pragmatism or 'realism'. However, familiarity with Indian cultural codes would make it evident that the duality of the Indian position—espousal of democratic ideals but indifference to violations of democratic freedoms—closely resembles the dualities that characterise Brahminical social and cultural attitudes. Despite the avowal of a highly moral and lofty world view that may appear sympathetic to human life in general, Brahminism has perpetuated, and shown remarkable indifference to, cruelties against certain communities. Documented in Brahminical texts such as *Manusmiriti* and still reportedly practiced in many parts of India, these cruelties are not the mere denial of common human rights of freedom of speech, expression and assembly. Instead, these are practices that inflict debilitating generational harm on the targeted communities by making examples of individual persons. It is instructive to recall the appreciation Indian strategists and policymakers show for texts such as

Arthashastra and *Sukraniti*, which carry distinct Brahminical imprint, for their pre-scriptions on governance, diplomacy, military strategy and foreign relations. Risking some exaggeration, it is possible to suggest that the Brahminical *gaze* generates considerable disinterest in India for promoting humanitarian causes that upsets and is at variance with the behaviour of western liberal democracies.

It is interesting that calls for India to participate in democracy promotion have grown stronger in the second decade of economic liberalisation. These proposals may imply a normative position that after struggling with unfamiliar forms for five decades, Indian democracy has begun to show signs of familiarity with democracy as it has evolved in the West. The preceding discussion contests this normative position. Indian democracy has not emerged solely from economic lib-eralisation or through struggles for rights of individuals in an industrialising soci-ety. Democracy in India acquired ideational and institutional existence through the contestations of political elites who were united in their conviction of possess-ing political sovereignty but differed over the ends political sovereignty should serve. Democracy became the centre through which differing political hopes and expectations sought legitimacy and lease of acting upon modern India. The out-come is a form of democracy that contains formal or frayed elements of liberalism but remains predominantly non-liberal in practice.

Though India has prominently emphasised its democratic identity in interna-tional forums, it has been careful to not characterise itself singularly as a liberal democracy. Yet, its self-identity as being more than a liberal democracy does not adequately acknowledge the complexity of its non-liberal democratic practices, especially the comparative swiftness with which the latter have substantially reworked its foundational liberal intent. This effectively implies that India's offi-cial self-identity presents a partial and wishful description of its democracy and the values it espouses. Therefore, scholars and formulators of India's foreign pol-icy must examine its democratic practices more closely.

Notes

1. A feature of this belief is that no matter how unfamiliar or ironical they appear, political practices can be understood best by being related to the vision from which they originated. Thus, if India's foundational intent was to become liberal democracy, and if liberal democracy has Western origins, then the proper method of understanding its practices is relating them with the Western ideals of liberal democracy. As per this approach, unfamiliar and ironical practices appear distortions of the foundational vision, which would, given enough time and resources, normalise in accordance with the vision. Sudipta Kaviraj has suggested that this tendency prevails because political language in the non-West has not kept pace with changing political practices. We are therefore left to cope with 'strange practices masquerading under familiar names' (Kaviraj 2009: 172).
2. L.T. Hobhouse's restatement in his *Liberalism* (1911) and John Dunn's exposition of liberal ambivalences (2000: 29–56) remain instructive, especially for avoiding self-righteous tones which characterise several contemporary enumerations of liberal principles.
3. This tendency persists because formal articulations adopt the empiricist mode of theorising whereas the organising motivation carried by the sentiment is strongly historicist.

4. A strikingly high proportion of these perspectives come from policy-oriented institutions and scholars. The absence of more reflective academic examinations of the nature of Indian democracy against the calls for India to support Western democracy promotion is telling.

5. US President Barack Obama's 23 September 2010 speech at the UN General Assembly noted: 'I appeal to those nations who emerged from tyranny and inspired the world in the second half of the last century—from South Africa to South Asia; from Eastern Europe to South America. Don't stand idly by, don't be silent, when dissidents elsewhere are imprisoned and protesters are beaten. Recall your own history. Because part of the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others.' (*The Wall Street Journal*. 2010).

6. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's speeches convey this sense of open-endedness on India's foreign policy and its democratic identity.

7. All substantive arguments in this part belong solely to these scholars, a contextual reading of whose works it offers. My authorial interventions here only serve to expose the sharp differences between the claims of these scholars on the nature of Indian democracy and Indian and Western perspectives outlined above.

8. This outline synthesises three pivotal moments of liberal thought—Locke's emphasis on property, Kant's emphasis on reason and Habermas's re-emphasis on common humanity—as it appears today.

9. A less strident measure for liberals to relate their claims against practices of Indian democracy is John Rawls's concept of a 'decent society'. For Rawls, a decent society is a non-liberal society 'whose basic institutions meet certain specified conditions of political right and justice' with rights of citizens to play a substantial role in making political decisions (1999: 3).

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