EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF THE STATE IN SOUTH ASIA

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The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) is dedicated to research on contemporary South Asia. It was established in July 2004 as an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore (NUS). The establishment of ISAS reflects South Asia's increasing economic and political importance and the strong historical links between South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The Institute seeks to promote understanding of this vital region of the world and communicate knowledge and insights about it to policymakers, the business community, academia and civil society in Singapore and beyond.

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Everyday Experiences of the State in South Asia

Institute of South Asian Studies

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Executive Summary

As the state manifests in various forms in the everyday lived experiences of the people, it is useful to critically examine the institutions, processes of political power and contestations among the socio-economic groups.

The state in South Asia is a historical and amorphous entity, and its post-colonial manifestations have distinct relations with individuals and communities. As the state manifests in various forms in the everyday lived experiences of the people, it is useful to critically examine the institutions, processes of political power and contestations among the socio-economic groups.

The International Conference on South Asia is an annual flagship event of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. The conference in 2023 sought to assess the everyday experiences of the state in South Asia across three main themes. The first was the perception by the people of the state in their everyday encounters. The second was the state and governance. The third was the limits and boundaries of the modern nation-state.

In an attempt to provide an in-depth perspective on these issues, the conference brought together scholars, practitioners and researchers from various disciplines, such as political science, sociology, anthropology, development studies, history, geography and media studies.

The conference was organised into six panels – Everyday Imaginations of Authority in South Asia; Everyday Experiences of the State in South Asia; Everyday Politics of State Delivery in South Asia; Everyday Politics of Identity and the State in South Asia; the Surveillance State in South Asia; and Stately Bodies in South Asia. This special report is the outcome of the discussions on these themes during the conference.

Introduction

The idea of the state is an evolving concept depending on the vantage point from which it is experienced. The modern, independent nation-state in South Asia is recent in its inception, while the way the state is experienced and perceived is impacted by historical and ideological factors. Several perceptions of the state, sometimes contradictory, are held simultaneously by the same sections of society. Understanding various aspects of the state, governance and society in these countries is important as it provides a better sense of the political trajectories of the region and what the future of governance may look like. Moreover, this understanding holds policy value, offering a more comprehensive view of how state transformation and governance are experienced and negotiated by diverse groups, both at the centre and on the peripheries.

The first chapter of this report explores the idea of authority and the state in South Asia. It looks at how people see authority and how governments/parts of the state gain or lose support and legitimacy from the public. States in South Asia wield authority through constitutional frameworks, legal systems and administrative institutions but the degree of legitimacy and effectiveness varies widely among countries. Challenges such as corruption, political instability, ethno-religious tensions and social inequalities often undermine state authority in the region. Additionally, the relationship between state authority and public perceptions is evolving and complex, with public trust and confidence in government institutions based on factors such as transparency, accountability and the delivery of essential services.

The second chapter examines various aspects related to the everyday experiences of the state in South Asia. This refers to people's regular experiences and encounters with the state – from accessing public services such as healthcare, education and welfare to engaging with law enforcement and judicial systems. However, these interactions often highlight systemic challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies,

Several perceptions of the state, sometimes contradictory, are held simultaneously by the same sections of society.

corruption and disparities in service delivery. Everyday experiences of the state in South Asia are seen to be characterised by a complex interplay of power and inequality.

The third chapter explores how state delivery is experienced by different groups of people. Questions of complicity and ambiguities of people in the very systems and official power structures that are open to popular critique are asked. State delivery is experienced differently among various groups of people, largely influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnicity, religion and gender. Moreover, historical and systemic discrimination against certain communities further exacerbates and reinforces their marginalisation within the state delivery system.

Majoritarianism, where the interests and preferences of the majority community are prioritised over those of minority groups, is a prevalent phenomenon in many countries in the region.

The fourth chapter discusses identity politics, majoritarianism and inter-group conflicts in South Asian states. Majoritarianism, where the interests and preferences of the majority community are prioritised over those of minority groups, is a prevalent phenomenon in many countries in the region. This often leads to marginalisation and disenfranchisement of minority communities, fuelling social unrest and conflict. Ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions are also frequently exploited by political actors to mobilise support and consolidate power, further deepening social divisions.

The fifth chapter explores how the state regulates data, (mis)information and the movement of people. Concerns surrounding data privacy and security have prompted governments worldwide, including those in South Asia, to enact legislation and establish regulatory frameworks to govern the collection, storage and dissemination of personal information. However, the balance between protecting individual privacy rights and ensuring national security remains a contentious issue, with debates over the scope of government surveillance and data access powers. Similarly, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation online has prompted governments to implement measures to combat fake news, hate speech and online extremism, often through content moderation and censorship efforts. Furthermore, the regulation of the

movement of people, including immigration policies, border controls and surveillance mechanisms, reflects government calculations over issues such as security, labour mobility and social integration.

Finally, the last chapter examines to what extent states govern the body and in what ways the people are 'ungovernable'. South Asian states have a complex relationship with their citizens. For example, the regulation of the consumption of certain food items is governed by a combination of laws and regulations and is deeply political. Similarly, norms of gender and sexuality are often influenced by state interventions, including laws, policies and cultural practices. The state also governs and disciplines dissent through various strategies

The State: Imagination and Authority

The authority of the state is negotiated not only through its mandate but in everyday life and interactions. These interactions reify the understanding of authority for individuals within communities and in popular culture. In South Asia, we are witnessing a rise in the authoritarian nature of the state. This makes it imperative to understand how people respond to imaginations of authority, what their expectations from the state are and how, in this process, authority is reproduced.

This chapter examines these themes while drawing from diverse examples in South Asia, such as rural Uttar Pradesh, flood-ridden Sindh and border towns in Nepal.

Imagination and the State

When we focus on agency, imagination becomes a staging ground for action.

The imagination of authority needs to be examined in a theoretical and evidence-driven way. To do so, it is important to first understand how imagination is conceived. Imagination operates in everyday life as an avenue through which the prospects of change are conceived. It interacts with everyday processes like commoditisation, industrial capitalism and mass media. It can further facilitate mass media by mobilising resistance or agency. When we focus on agency, imagination becomes a staging ground for action.

This also reflects that imagination is not linked to individuals but functions at a collective level – community sentiments and imagining togetherness within groups are reflective of this property. From this, we can extrapolate that imagination can be seen as an organised field of social practice and a form of negotiation between sites of agency. Imagination, in this way, becomes a resource for change, emancipation and other processes.

Drawing from the experience of a rural village in Uttar Pradesh in India, we can see how imagination, agency and the state work

together. This village has a high rate of migration among lower-caste men. This is because of how the state's employment scheme works and interacts with caste. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offers employment in rural areas.[1] High-caste villagers do not like to engage in this work due to their caste status, yet they accept the pay offered by the scheme.

Lower caste villagers in this process end up receiving little to no payment, which pushes them to look for opportunities in other metropolitan areas like Mumbai, in this case. In their perception, while the state is offering a level playing field, it is not delivering for them. There is still hope in the imagination of what the state may offer in the future. This imagination, tied to the agency of moving away, brings in remittances to the village. However, it has also brought diseases like HIV and AIDS, which have resulted in several deaths, leaving households incomplete. This case demonstrates how the imagination for a better future and agency have boundaries – sometimes to the detriment of the community.

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Everyday State During Disaster

Everyday interactions with the state produce and reproduce it and its authority. In this sense, the state is not a coherent entity, but something produced by people, structures and spaces. Employing a framework or lens, such as the aftermath of a natural disaster, can aid in assessing how people interact with the state and how they perceive and understand it. By drawing on ethnographic research in Pakistan's Sindh province in the aftermath of the Indus River floods in 2010-2011, certain avenues open up to explore interactions between the state and people. Despite falling short of people's expectations, the idea of the state, or *sarkaar*, remains stable.

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[1] The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was instituted in 2005 as a programme that legally binds the government to provide 100 days of employment in public works each year to adult members of a households in rural areas who demand employment. See *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 2013, https://rural.gov.in/sites/default/files/MGNREGA_FAQ_ENGLISH.pdf.

These instances are reflective of the everyday difficulties and challenges with state interaction and are not uncommon across South Asia.

Here, everyday encounters with the state include the act and process of receiving cash transfers from the government. This is done through a debit card called the *Watan* (Nation) card.[2] This process involved queueing up at the limited cash points in cities and rural areas across flood-affected areas. Collecting money often led to people missing out on a day's work due to time-consuming queues, and workers would sometimes leave empty-handed because of arbitrary issues like funds not being transferred. These instances are reflective of the everyday difficulties and challenges with state interaction and are not uncommon across South Asia.

In the same region, we also see the state being reproduced through interactions over failed hydraulic infrastructures. The failure of a drainage project every year becomes part of the cyclical process of unequal state production. Residents of these spaces hold the belief that the state is perpetually serving the interest of others – while not working for them. This 'other' changes as the vantage point changes. This leads to the production and reproduction of an unequal state where people believe it is working for an 'other' while it may not be working for anyone.

Border Areas and State Authority

Border areas in South Asia also present unique modes of governance and authority. The India-Nepal border, conceptualised as a border space, borderland and border town, gives important insights into the shaping of everyday politics and the production of authority.

Putting focus on Birganj is instructive, given its critical role as a key border checkpoint and being the site of India-Nepal tensions in 2015. The state in Birganj also demonstrates how it interacts with other actors to produce authority. The duality of the state is evidenced by the governance dynamics between the Marwari trading community and the state. This nexus represents financial power and muscle

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[2] 'Watan Card', National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), Government of Pakistan, https://www.nadra.gov.pk/watan-card/.

power respectively, which allows them to invoke authority in the borderlands.

The creation of 'border people' as a category came into focus following the Madhes uprising in 2007-2008.[3] This was followed by an intense spell of criminality where the Marwari community became an ally of the state in engineering a border blockade. The crackdown on crime and gangs led to the emergence of new figures of authority within law enforcement. For instance, there are instances of particular officers who were singlehandedly credited for restoring law and order in the region. They emerged and reified the state's heroic role in maintaining peace and countering violence. They have also been a source of inspiration for movies in the region.

The crackdown on crime and gangs led to the emergence of new figures of authority within law enforcement.

The emerging Hindu-Muslim contestation in India has also taken ground in Nepal and its border areas. There have been instances of engineering violence and polarisation within communities.[4] In turn, to contain violence, popular imaginations of heroism and masculinity emerge, resulting in the social reproduction of authority in these border regions.

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3 Kalpana Jha, *The Madhesi Upsurge and the Contested Idea of Nepal* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2017).
4 Joshua Bowes, 'The Vitalisation of Hindu Nationalism in Nepal and Social Media as a Tool of Pro-Hindutva Propaganda Overseas', GNET Research, 21 December 2023, https://gnet-research.org/2023/12/21/the-vitalisation-of-hindu-nationalism-in-nepal-and-social-media-as-a-tool-of-pro-hindutva-propaganda-overseas/.

Politics of State Delivery in South Asia

The experiences of different groups of people in accessing public welfare give us insights into their relationship with the state.

The delivery of state welfare is an important metric for analysing governance. The experiences of different groups of people in accessing public welfare give us insights into their relationship with the state. This chapter delves into three instances from within South Asia that demonstrate how the state's delivery of welfare, or public services, has evolved and gives context to how the wider political economy operates. These three instances include Bangladesh's COVID-19 pandemic experience, India's public service delivery under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance and Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and debt restructuring in a crisis-ridden Sri Lanka.

This set of examples from South Asia gives us insights into some new developments in state-led welfare and public responses to them, the political impacts of economic instability and the impact on electoral politics. The diverse experiences of governance also highlight some interesting contrasts between the experiences of the state and its citizenry.

Bangladesh and the Pandemic Feedback Mechanisms

The COVID-19 pandemic led governments across the world to deploy unprecedented steps to contain the spread of the virus and roll out vaccines efficiently and equitably. In Bangladesh, the government announced a lockdown and a relief programme, which was followed by a successful vaccination campaign.[5] Despite the country's poor healthcare system, Bangladesh was able to fall back on its experience of dealing with healthcare crises in the past, its success in vaccine delivery and the rural women-centric social protection schemes it has had in place since the 1970s.

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[5] 'A Timely Response and Vaccination Program Help Bangladesh Contain the COVID-19 Pandemic', World Bank, 6 April 2022, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/04/06/a-timely-response-and-vaccination-program-help-bangladesh-contain-the-covid-19-pandemic.

The state also employed feedback mechanisms for the effective delivery of these policies. There were several feedback mechanisms put in place in Bangladesh during the pandemic. These included formal platforms like the various hotlines that people could connect with for COVID-19-related consultations. The 333 hotline, for instance, became the de facto platform for all kinds of complaints.[6] In the vaccine rollout process, the *Surokkha* (protection) Vaccine application (app) served as a platform to register for vaccination and filing vaccine-related complaints. The *Surokkha* app is presented as an example of the competence of the Bangladeshi state in engaging with citizens in a time of crisis. A survey has shown that 99 per cent of the participating Bangladeshis received vaccinations and 86 per cent of these had registered through the app.[7]

Besides formal channels people also used informal feedback mechanisms. This means engaging with local government representatives directly. Research has shown that more than 80 per cent of respondents indicated that they were likely to lodge complaints with their local representatives in person. It is also important to note here that the Bangladeshi society is relatively less hierarchical than the other South Asian countries, and people from all levels of incomes feel empowered to file complaints and give their feedback on governance. There is an impression of futility in lodging complaints online although most people look at the government's effort to develop formal feedback mechanisms as positive. Formal mechanisms in this way had fallen short in practice. The reliance on formal mechanisms is impacted by the uneven digital divide in Bangladesh despite the 'Digital Bangladesh' vision.[8]

In this way, there has been a shift from top-down governance to a culture of performative accountability in actively engaging citizens.

There is an impression of futility in lodging complaints online although most people look at the government's effort to develop formal feedback mechanisms as positive.

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[6] '333 Helpline Providing COVID-19 Support', United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh, 7 May 2020, https://www.undp.org/bangladesh/stories/333-helpline-providing-covid-19-support.

[7] Zahir Ahmed, Syeda Salina Aziz, Shuvra Chowdhury, Mirza Hassan, Rafsanul Hoque, Naomi Hossain, Pranab Kumar Panday and Marium Ul-Mutahara, 'The Feedback State: Listening and Responding to Bangladesh's Citizens During the COVID-19 Pandemic', Manusher Jonno Foundation, 2023.

[8] 'Unequal Disruptions: The Digital Divide During COVID-19', Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), 7 May 2020, https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/media-center/blog/2020/Unequal-Disruptions-The-Digital-Divide-During-COVID-19.html.

The government here recognises the importance of citizen feedback; however, this capacity – especially in the effectiveness of formal mechanisms – is inhibited by economic problems and state capacity.

Electoral Politics and State Delivery in India

This is evident in the rise of parties organised across regional lines and the BJP's first stint in power in 1999 when its affiliated organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh provided patronage provisions to subaltern groups.

The intersection of public goods and services delivery with electoral politics raises questions about voting behaviour, patronage and efficacy of the state. The evolution of electoral politics in India since 2014 is an important case to gain an understanding of how electoral politics and voter behaviour are driven by the politics of public service delivery. Literature by authors like Kanchan Chandra argues that people tend to vote along ethnic lines to receive patronage.[9] This is evident in the rise of parties organised across regional lines and the BJP's first stint in power in 1999 when its affiliated organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh provided patronage provisions to subaltern groups. However, with the BJP's recent rise, the patronage provision model has come under question.

The BJP won 31 per cent popular vote in the Indian general elections of 2014.[10] The BJP government was preceded by the UPA government (2004-2014). The UPA government was widely known for expanding social citizenship with initiatives such as the Right to Food and the MGNREGA. The change in the government has brought into question the drivers of voting concerning public goods and service delivery.

The BJP presents a vision of development which goes beyond lines of ethnic cleavage as opposed to the Congress-led UPA, which was embroiled in corruption allegations and was targeted for community-directed welfare. The BJP's welfare model is presented as an alternative. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP concentrated on welfare goods that did not have much selectivity, such as gas

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9   Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

10 'Lok Sabha Elections: BJP's 31% lowest vote share of any party to win majority', *Times of India*, 19 May 2014, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/bjps-31-lowest-vote-share-of-any-party-to-win-majority/articleshow/35315930.cms?from=mdr.

cylinders and bank accounts. The idea here is to appeal to a whole set of people not represented by a particular political party. At the same time, provisions by Modi, such as gas cylinders, aid in building trust between the state and the patron.

Such politics fed into Modi's rhetoric of development for everyone – *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas* (Together with All, Development for All) – not just for privileged recipients. This electoral mobilisation reaches across cleavages and boundaries, whereas the Congress coalitions were assembling multiple constituencies. When this is coupled with a centralised state delivery system, it can be electorally beneficial as well. Modi's politics is also very performative, and it has undermined the perceptions of an elitist Congress. In this way, the BJP's politics can be understood through electoral cleavages engendered through public service delivery.

In this way, the BJP's politics can be understood through electoral cleavages engendered through public service delivery.

Debt Restructuring and the Working Poor in Sri Lanka

In the recent past, Sri Lanka has gone through major economic and political upheavals. This section looks at state delivery against the backdrop of these crises.

The Sri Lankan polity has witnessed several degrees of suppression since the civil war in 1983. The nationalism that started with the politicisation of the Sinhala Buddhist consciousness in the 1980s has permeated all minorities in the country, including the Tamils and Muslims.

In attempts to uphold the state, politicians recurringly unmake the nation and recreate the fissures in society which do not allow room to address the violence and pain of the past. The fissures and cleavages in Sri Lankan society are complex. The religious right-wing nationalist coalition between Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists are united against the Muslim community.

Besides the political and social aspects, there is also economic violence and disempowerment. While this dynamic has remained neglected,

these contestations draw on inequality, wealth distribution, resource misallocation and corruption. Since the *Aragalaya* (struggle) and the COVID-19 pandemic, these factors have been further aggravated.[11] During the COVID-19 pandemic, the working classes were subjected to incredibly long queues to obtain life-saving essentials and utilities like medicines and kerosene. The economic crisis became the portal to Sri Lanka's sociality and polity. The nature of the economy – and who it works for – became increasingly visible.

The impact of the crisis cut across all ethnic and religious groups, and there was a realisation among the public that the economic crisis and political prejudice were common themes in Sri Lanka's ethnic policy.[12] For these reasons, during the *Aragalaya*, the coming together of various communities in solidarity protests was deemed significant.

The state is working towards fulfilling the interests of the financial creditors rather than its people.

The economic dynamic of the violence is visible with respect to the external debt issue in Sri Lanka. The discourse around the indebtedness of Sri Lanka is dominated by corruption, and what it often overlooks is how the debt is passed on to the working class. This is what is being witnessed in Sri Lanka through domestic debt optimisation, which is targeting worker pension funds, which serve as social security for the working poor.[13] This is unprecedented, given that no other country has targeted the savings of the working classes in this way. The state is working towards fulfilling the interests of the financial creditors rather than its people. This is also distinct from the discussion on Bangladesh and India in the preceding sections, where some degree of performative accountability was deemed desirable by leaders looking for re-election.

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[11] In 2022, following an economic turmoil, mass protests sparked across Sri Lanka. This was called the Aragalaya (struggle). This movement resulted in the resignation of then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

[12] Geethika Dharmasinghe, 'Aragalaya Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 58, no. 32, 12 August 2023, pp. 17-19. https://www.epw.in/journal/2023/32/commentary/aragalaya%C2%A0movement.html.

[13] Jayati Ghosh and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura, 'Sri Lanka's Dangerous Domestic Debt Restructuring – Economy and Ecology', *IPS Journal*, 21 September 2021, https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/economy-and-ecology/sri-lankas-dangerous-domestic-debt-restructuring-7005/.

Identity Politics and Political Ideologies in South Asia

The politics of identity in South Asia is layered across several dynamics, including language, ethnicity, caste, class, religion and gender. These identities are mobilised and organised in the specific contexts of politics. This section highlights these contexts by drawing on three examples from across the region. It explores the gender dynamic in the context of Kolkata and how homosocial behaviour in law enforcement can be observed in urban areas. Drawing on religious identities, the dynamics of majority and minority communities are discussed with reference to Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

These identities are mobilised and organised in the specific contexts of politics.

Identity politics, majoritarianism and inter-group conflicts are not uncommon themes in South Asian politics. It is important to contextualise and unpack these issues to answer foundational and complex questions like how identities are constructed, how to understand shifts in political ideologies and how ideas of citizenship and belonging operate in states and society.

Homosocial Masculinities in Everyday Law Enforcement

Social control and policing in cities are intimately linked, and incorporating masculinity as a unit of analysis can help gauge the everyday politics of identity. Ethnographic work – involving observing interactions of public transport vehicle operators and traffic police in Kolkata – reveals how homosocial trust operates. Homosocial trust identifies the moral vocabulary of masculinity by which men who are otherwise framed in conflictual relationships can transact situational trust in the city.

This is evidenced by interactions between traffic police personnel and public transport drivers. Instances such as taxi drivers helping an unconscious sergeant or conversationally conveying driving norms and linking it to being a good father and provider show how this

homosocial trust is built and transacted. Such interactions and trust enable transport workers to navigate everyday law enforcement and the unpredictability of urban life.

These interactions also reflect the emotional and moral ethos of urban law enforcement. The gendered character of urban policing also contributes to our understanding of the development of cities and urban areas as male spaces. This raises questions about the basis on which homosocial trust is built.

Such trust is built on the mutual recognition of three indices of masculinity:

1. Morally exalted status of male breadwinners;

2. The city as the primary site of the achievement of the index of masculinity; and

3. Patriarchal definitions of men's roles within the heteronormative family

This effectively empowers working-class male drivers, but it comes at the expense of inhibiting women's access to public spaces.

Interactions predicated on these markers of masculinity legitimise the city as a site of hegemonic masculine performance and reproduce the city as a patriarchal space. This effectively empowers working-class male drivers, but it comes at the expense of inhibiting women's access to public spaces.

Different layers of identity also operate in such spaces, particularly with respect to the passenger, where class is often a feature. Middle-class passengers want to employ the services of working-class drivers but also want them to remain invisible. Ethnicity also conflates with the question of masculinity. In Kolkata, there is an increasing number of taxi drivers who have emigrated from Bihar and replaced the Sikh community in this profession. The Bihari drivers are seen as uncouth and uncivilised. Across these lines, however, the gendered roles and male hegemonic presence in public spaces remain. The prevailing

ideology of the male breadwinners drives the collaborative logic between the traffic police and working-class drivers.

Invisibility as an Ethic: Hindus in Pakistan

Survival as a religious minority in the face of resilient and rising right-wing forces brings out various responses and bargains in everyday life. Decisions around career choices and the habits embodied by individuals are driven by considerations of a hostile environment. Looking at how the Hindu community operates in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, reveals the use of invisibility as a tactic.

The Hindus constitute a little over seven per cent of Sindh's population[14] and form a significant minority in the province. The community has adopted a tactic of invisibility in public spaces while performing their roles being a minority and being citizens.[15]

However, this invisibility varies across classes. The upper-caste Sindhi-speaking Hindus form the dominant voice of the Hindu community. They can maintain this due to historical economic ties with the Muslim landowning classes. This allows the minority community to use back channels to further their interests without having to represent their interests publicly. This mechanism allows this dominant section of the minority to practice invisibility.

This dominant section can practice its freedom of speech within liberal and secular circles, which are part of the private circles in Pakistan. This is consistent with Arif Hassan's assessment of the rise of Zia-Ul-Haq's populism and how the liberal elite groups were able to recede to the private sphere and enjoy certain freedoms without dominating public life in any way.[16] In dealing with blasphemy cases,

Looking at how the Hindu community operates in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, reveals the use of invisibility as a tactic.

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14 Data based on Provincial Census Report of Sindh (2017) and author's calculations. 'Provincial Census Report Sindh – 2017', Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), 2017, https://www.pbs.gov.pk/.
15 Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Alessandro Castelli, 'Social Camouflage: Functions, Logic, Paradoxes', Distinktion 17, August 2016; and Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990).
16 Arif Hasan, 'From the Demise of Cosmopolitanism to Its Revival: Trends and Repercussions for Karachi', in *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi: Publics and Counterpublics*, ed. by Nichola Khan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 173-86.

The use of social media and more public forms of expression raises the risk of right-wing groups using their street power to polarise and magnify the issue.

for instance, back-channel politics proves to be an effective way. The use of social media and more public forms of expression raises the risk of right-wing groups using their street power to polarise and magnify the issue.

The lower-caste Hindu groups, however, are not extended the same privileges of elite networks and retreating to private spheres. These groups have to rely on social media and online forums for activism. They do not reveal their identities online and tend to keep a low profile in everyday life. These instances show that the experience of religious discrimination varies across the intersectionality of class, gender and locality, despite it being painted by a broad brush of religion. As evidenced by this account, the practice of invisibility depends on the relationship with the state, with elite networks, and with how coping strategies are deployed.

Negotiating Religion in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a Buddhist majority, and Buddhism enjoys a privileged position in the constitution. Christianity and Buddhist nationalism have converged in their religious rhetoric, consolidating exclusivist religious commitments. In response to the new growth of ambitious proselytising varieties of Christianity, Buddhist revivalists attempted to use legislation to block the growth of new churches. Religious minorities have also worked to counterbalance the Buddhist majority's nationalist religious lobbying by engaging in public discourse about religious persecution.

The engagement of the majority and minority communities with the media demonstrates a divergence in their approaches. Mainstream television channels have often spotlighted Buddhist-Christian altercations in a way that intentionally undermines the possibility that Sinhalese Buddhists might become positively attuned to the Christian concept of *Subharami*, which means 'good news'. Dharma was also broadcast through the launch of a Colombo-based religious channel, *The Buddhist*, in 2007, funded by then-President Mahinda

Rajapaksa.[17] That same year, a Dalit evangelical network known as *God TV* was introduced on cable television.

Through everyday interactions between Buddhists and Christians in proximity, macro-level political antagonisms over religion are managed through complex negotiations. Neither absolute exclusivity nor radical pluralism is evident within these socially proximate interactions. This emerges as a multi-cameral approach — one that is situated within two communities and illuminates negotiations in the everyday sphere.

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[17] 'Sri Lanka Getting its First Buddhist TV Channel', *Sunday Times*, 2007, https://www.sundaytimes.lk/070701/News/nws16.html.

Everyday Experiences of the State in South Asia

In South Asia's socio-political landscape, the interplay between state institutions, governance paradigms and the lived experiences of its diverse populace weaves a complex narrative of power, resistance and identity. This chapter focuses on labour activism in Bangladesh's garment industry, the evolving contours of neoliberal governance in Pakistan and the socio-political dynamics of pilgrimage sites in post-war Sri Lanka.

Each sub-section examines a unique facet of the everyday encounters of the state and analyses the varying landscapes where statehood is negotiated, contested and redefined.

Labour Experiences in Bangladesh's Apparel Export Industry

This sector experiences constant surveillance, interrogation and intimidation by intelligence services and the police, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

Surveillance culture is an integral part of the experience of labour organisers and workers within Bangladesh's garment export industry. This sector experiences constant surveillance, interrogation and intimidation by intelligence services and the police, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Despite being a form of forced engagement with the state, these encounters are often cloaked in the language of hospitality, blurring the lines between state control and societal norms.[18]

Historically, surveillance in Bangladesh has intensified, reflecting broader global shifts towards neoliberal governance. The state, perceived as an assemblage of institutions, prioritises serving transnational and national capital over labour interests. This neoliberal agenda is often rationalised in the name of national development,

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[18] Md Shoaib Ahmed and Shahzad Uddin, 'Workplace bullying and intensification of labour controls in the clothing supply chain: post-Rana Plaza disaster', *Work, Employment and Society*, 2022, 539-556, https://ideas.repec.org/a/sae/woemps/v36y2022i3p539-556.html.

wherein the interests of garment workers are subordinated to those of the nation and industry. Further, a narrative of sacrifice is perpetuated to maintain control over labour and suppress demands for fair wages and working conditions. Workers are often expected to endure substandard wages and working conditions for the purported greater good of the nation and industry. This discourse perpetuates a cycle of exploitation and marginalisation, wherein labour rights are sacrificed at the altar of economic progress.

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However, there are signs of resistance and questioning within the labour movement.[19] There have also been calls for 'smart wages' that go beyond mere subsistence, pushing back against the notion that workers should settle for minimal compensation. This defiance represents an attempt to renegotiate the social contract between the state and its citizens, challenging the entrenched power dynamics that prioritise capital over labour rights.

Overall, there exists a complex interplay between surveillance, state power and labour activism in Bangladesh's garment industry. It underscores the inherent tensions between neoliberal economic policies, democratic ideals and the lived experiences of workers navigating a system that prioritises profit over their well-being. However, despite the pervasive surveillance culture and neoliberal hegemony, the emerging signs of resistance and defiance in the labour movement offer hope for a more equitable and just future for Bangladesh's garment workers.

Neoliberal Governance: The Experience of Pakistan

This section delves into the historical evolution of mass housing projects in Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s, alongside an analysis of contemporary Islamic economics and finance. While they

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[19] Mirza M Hassan, Syeda Salina Aziz, Raeesa Rahemin, Insiya Khan and Rafsanul Hoque, 'The Political Economy of the Landscape of Trade Unions in Bangladesh: The Case of the RMG Sector', BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, 2022, https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/publications/the-political-economy-of-the-landscape-of-trade-unions-in-bangladesh-the-case-of-rmg-sector/.

are seemingly disparate subjects, the discussion underscores their implications for governance and daily life.

It offers an insight into the broader socio-political context of the region and sheds light on the evolving dynamics of governance, urbanisation and social welfare.

The ambitious mass housing programmes in General Ayub Khan's Pakistan in the late 1950s and early 1960s raised a number of questions about popular experiences of the developmentalist state in South Asia. It offers an insight into the broader socio-political context of the region and sheds light on the evolving dynamics of governance, urbanisation and social welfare. While the prevailing notion associates neoliberalism solely with economic liberalisation in the 1980s, developments pertaining to mass housing projects in Pakistan reveal the emergence of neoliberal governance as early as the 1960s, thereby highlighting its multidimensional nature beyond mere economic doctrine.

Discourse on mass housing initiatives in Pakistan reveals intricate dynamics of state power and governance. Analysis of state interventions in urban development projects elucidates the coexistence of various power modalities, including sovereign, disciplinary and managerial, which significantly shape citizens' daily experiences. For instance, in a place like the newly created township of Korangi, the 'state' was not an easily identifiable agency but came in the shape of army officers turned bureaucrats, social workers, architects from Pakistan and abroad, as well as private and state-employed international consultants financed by international aid. Depending on circumstances, the 'people', meanwhile, were thought of and addressed as citizens of a new nation-state, as communities facing a post-imperial sovereign, or as individuals with market preferences.

Michel Foucault's work on Ordo-liberalism[20] and the concepts of governmentality and biopolitics is useful to understanding the

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[20] Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in 1978-1979 centred on the analysis of power with regard to liberalism. To read more, see Nils Goldschmidt and Hermann Rauchenschwandtner, 'The Philosophy of Social Market Economy: Michel Foucault's Analysis of Ordoliberalism', *Journal of Contextual Economics–Schmollers Jahrbuch*, Vol.2 (2018): 157-84; Freiburg Discussion Papers on Constitutional Economics, Walter Eucken Institute, 2007, https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/aluord/074.html.

evolving nature of governance and state power and their ramifications for societal structures. State power is found to operate through the techniques of governmentality, shaping individuals' behaviour, subjectivities and social relations.

Moving to the contemporary context, the intersection of Islamic economics and finance with state governance is relevant. It highlights the significance of private consumer decisions, such as embracing Islamic banking or engaging in halal businesses, as avenues for identity expression and state legitimacy, underscoring the intricate interplay between economic behaviours, cultural identities and state policies.

Overall, historical contextualisation in understanding present-day phenomena aids in the nuanced comprehension of governance, integrating structural dynamics with lived experiences.

Pilgrimages and Statehood in Post-war Sri Lanka

The socio-political dynamics surrounding pilgrimage sites in Sri Lanka elucidate an aspect of the everyday experience of the state. Importantly, the socio-political discrepancies, such as sites in Kuragala and Jaffna, highlight the shift in post-war Sri Lanka from popular religious destinations to newly constructed Buddhist temples in the south and some war-memorial sites in the north.

The socio-political dynamics surrounding pilgrimage sites in Sri Lanka elucidate an aspect of the everyday experience of the state.

In Kuragala, the discrepancy between local and outsider perceptions of place names emphasises the importance of indigenous knowledge in understanding cultural identity. While the place has been a significant pilgrimage destination with historical and religious significance for both Buddhists and Muslims, there has been a noticeable shift in the past decade, with many visitors drawn more by tourism than the site's sacredness.

The construction of a new Buddhist temple in Kuragala,[21] facilitated by the military, has also transformed the local landscape and identity. Kuragala is promoted as a singular Buddhist pilgrimage site, and this negatively impacts minority groups, particularly Muslims. Signboards explicitly limit access to certain areas, perpetuating exclusionary practices that reinforce singular Buddhist hegemony. This exclusionary rhetoric also extends to Jaffna, where war memorial sites have become pilgrimage destinations predominantly for singular Buddhists, despite the region's Tamil Hindu dominance.

These developments situate pilgrimage sites within broader debates on state-building. In Sri Lanka, the institutionalisation of sacredness through pilgrimage rituals and symbolic representations contributes to the construction of singular Buddhist statehood.

Pilgrimage experiences serve as everyday enactments of statehood, shaping collective consciousness and territorial perceptions.

Consequently, the process marginalises minority voices and advances a hegemonic narrative that prioritises a singular identity. Pilgrimage experiences serve as everyday enactments of statehood, shaping collective consciousness and territorial perceptions. Thus, by excluding the minorities from sacred spaces, pilgrims reinforce a sense of ownership and belonging along with the perpetuation of socio-political boundaries. Further, territorial iconography – which includes symbols and representations that embody territorial belonging and identity – shapes the everyday experiences and social consciousness while reinforcing notions of statehood and belonging.

Broadly, there exists a complex interplay between pilgrimage, identity and power. The evolving dynamics of pilgrimage sites, as arenas of contestation and negotiation, shed light on the multifaceted processes of state formation and the everyday experience of the state by the people. In the context of Sri Lanka, importantly, pilgrimage provides the essential ground for the everyday experience of the 'Sinhalese-Buddhist' statehood through memorial spaces and ethno-symbols.

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21 'The Contribution to the Construction of Kuragala Temple is Appreciated', Office of the Chief of Defence Staff, Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka, 3 September 2023, https://www.ocds.lk/content/contribution-construction-kuragala-temple-appreciated.

The Surveillance State in South Asia

The discourse on surveillance and its entwinement with state apparatuses date back to the inception of modern governance structures. Over time, data and statistics collected from citizens have been mobilised for different kinds of knowledge production to make citizens more governable. Today, the use of technology by the state has become an inevitable part of conducting surveillance through the regulation of data, (mis)information and the movement of people.

This chapter discusses three themes surrounding the surveillance state in India:

1. Links between environment and technology and the state's usage of satellites to inform its coastal governance systems;

2. The state's power in influencing the everyday lives of people through control of popular cinema enabled by film censorship and certification requirements; and

3. The evolution of digital infrastructure and data governance in India.

Today, the use of technology by the state has become an inevitable part of conducting surveillance through the regulation of data, (mis)information and the movement of people.

Satellite Technology and Coastal Governance in India

Satellite technology is increasingly being seen as a tool for the governance of coastal areas across India. In recent years, the Indian government's perception of the coast – shaped by satellite imagery – has impacted policies, ecological systems and human livelihoods. The Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) policy[22] serves as a pivotal instrument in organising the coast as a territorial unit, allowing for resource

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[22] 'Notification under Section 3(1) and Section 3(2)(v) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Rule 5(3)(d) of Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986, Declaring Coastal Stretches as Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) and Regulating Activities in the CRZ', Ministry of Environment and Forests, *The Gazette of India*, 19 February 1991, https://envisjnu.tripod.com/envlaw/legislation/crz/crz1.html.

mobilisation and border security. Satellite technology plays a crucial role in implementing this policy by providing visual control over the coast through cartographic drawings derived from satellite images. Importantly, these visuals are not just illustrative but form the very basis of the policy itself.

With each iteration, the policy expanded its scope, adding new zones, subzones and higher-resolution maps.

The understanding of the coast as a securitised and bounded entity is on account of India's CRZ. The evolution of the CRZ policy, from its inception in 1991 to its latest iteration in 2018,[23] underscores the increasing reliance on satellite technologies and survey techniques. With each iteration, the policy expanded its scope, adding new zones, subzones and higher-resolution maps. However, this expansion came at a cost as it has led to the reordering of coastal ecologies and the re-categorisation of coastal communities. The accuracy and immediacy provided by satellite imagery have enabled the atomisation of the coast into calculable resource potentials, thereby driving a growth-based outlook in the Indian fisheries industry.

Moreover, contemporary satellite technologies, which are deeply rooted in colonial histories of mapping and territorial control, perpetuate extractive environmental regimes. By turning the coast into bounded areas, satellite technology not only facilitates the commodification of resources but also exacerbates ecological degradation. This techno-centric approach to coastal governance marginalises small-scale fishers, trapping them in poverty and debt cycles.

The Case of Mora Gaon in Mumbai, India

The experience of Mora Gaon, a fishing village in the city of Mumbai, India, illustrates the real-world implications of satellite-based coastal governance. The 2012 incident involving the breach of a tanker – MT Pavit – in the area and the subsequent government responses to it

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[23] 'Ministry of Environment and Forests Announces Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), 2011 and Island Protection Zone, 2011', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 7 January 2011, https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease. aspx?relid=68936.

reveal the fundamental disjuncture between nearshore fishing[24] and contemporary coastal management. While the presence of the oil tanker prompted heightened surveillance and control measures by the Coast Guard, for the fishing community of Mora Gaon, this meant increased scrutiny of their coastal waters and the looming threat of environmental catastrophe.

The events in Mora Gaon serve as a microcosm of the broader dynamics at play between satellite technology, coastal governance and the lived experiences of fishing communities in India. The divergent perspectives of the fisher community and the state government highlight the complexities inherent in managing coastal resources. While the fishing community sees the coast as a site of socioeconomic and ecological relationships, the state government views it through the lens of territorial security and resource mobilisation.

While the fishing community sees the coast as a site of socioeconomic and ecological relationships, the state government views it through the lens of territorial security and resource mobilisation.

Given the discrepancies in perceptions and their far-reaching material and ecological consequences, it is imperative to scrutinise how the state perceives the coast. Overall, there is a necessity to adopt a holistic approach to coast governance that integrates local knowledge, scientific expertise and technological innovation to ensure the long-term well-being of both human and non-human coastal ecosystems.

Film Censorship and Bureaucracies

The evolution of India's digital surveillance state has roots in historical bureaucratic controls, notably seen in film censorship dating back to the British colonial era. Under the Raj, while the government provided reasons such as obscenity subversion and criminal incitement, scholars of film censorship contend that it was instead driven by paternalism, elitism and colonial anxieties.[25] This censorship persisted post-independence, impacting freedom of expression as enshrined in the Indian constitution.

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24 Nearshore fishing refers to small scale fishing practised widely by fishing communities along the coast.
25 Kartik Nair, *Seeing Things: Spectral Materialities of Bombay* Horror (Oakland: University of California Press, 2024).

The censorship of horror films in Bombay from the late 1970s to the early 1990s is emblematic of the state's growing control. In the late 1970s, after the period of the Emergency,[26] the bureaucratic processes of censorship exercised by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting involved extensive cuts and delays, showcasing the state's authority over cinematic content. Following the Emergency, the state worked towards increasing bureaucratisation as the path to procedural transparency. This was the transitional moment in which horror films in Bombay emerged to reconstruct the material terrain of censorship.

It depicts the power of the state in penetrating the everyday life of India, controlling popular cinema consumed by its people.

Importantly, the requirement of a censor certificate by the state-run Censor Board showing its approval of a movie is a clear sign of the government's authority over images. It depicts the power of the state in penetrating the everyday life of India, controlling popular cinema consumed by its people. For instance, in the case of *Darwaza*, India's first horror film, which was released in 1978, the documents of censorship reveal the large power held by censors as the film went through months of rejection, deferral, revision and reversal by the government before it was finally cleared for public release.

The state's reach is also visible beyond censorship delays and bureaucratic procedures through instances such as print laboratories being instructed not to print positives of a film that did not receive a certificate and films not being allowed to be preserved at the national film archive without a censor certificate. In this manner, certificates came to invisibly control the public life of cinema. Further, to homogenise the diverse movie viewers across the country, decision-making was coordinated across a geographically dispersed hierarchy. This was operationalised through *The Gazette of India*, which published itemised deletions and a list of certified films for theatre exhibitors to verify the legality of what was being screened. However, delays in publishing such information and the failure to

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[26] The Emergency in India was a 21-month period from 25 June 1975 to 21 March 1977 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of internal emergency in the country. The order allowed the prime minister to rule by decree and cancel elections and suspend civil liberties. It remains a controversial period in India's political history due to several criticisms including human rights violations, censorship, imprisonment of the ruling party's political opponents and propagandist use of public institutions.

include some films in *The Gazette* also led to concerns and anxieties, further depicting the far-reaching control of the state.

Efforts to modernise censorship, such as through the QR-coded certificates introduced in 2019,[27] have extended state surveillance through private networks and smartphones. This transition from physical to digital censorship reflects the continuity of state control in an evolving technological landscape. Further, while at present, there is no censorship of films on streaming services, the government is partaking in consultations to potentially enact censorship of such content in the future. However, streaming platforms are increasingly found to deliberately play the certified version of a film despite a lack of censorship, thereby reaffirming the state's authority. Thus, film censorship is likely to continue along with the involvement of private technology players as well.

This transition from physical to digital censorship reflects the continuity of state control in an evolving technological landscape.

Overall, the historical context of film censorship in India demonstrates the gradual consolidation of state surveillance, evolving from colonial paternalism to contemporary digital mechanisms. This narrative highlights the persistence of bureaucratic control and its adaptation to modern technology, shaping the landscape of digital surveillance in India today.

Digital Infrastructure and Governance in India

The post-liberalisation period in India witnessed a significant shift in data collection, storage and processing mechanisms. The transformation was marked further by the advent of the *Aadhaar* biometric infrastructure,[28] coinciding with the rise of big data and digital capitalism.

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[27] 'New Logo and Certificate Design of CBFC Unveiled', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 31 August 2019, https://pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1583766.

[28] *Aadhaar* is a 12-digit unique individual identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India, on behalf of the Indian government. The number serves as a proof of identity and address and is issued to any resident of India. For more information, see the UIDAI website - https://www.uidai.gov.in/.

India's *Aadhaar* project, initially framed as a national security initiative, has now expanded to permeate various aspects of citizens' lives, including financial transactions and welfare services. This expansion raises concerns about privacy, security and socioeconomic equity. Moreover, the narrative of India's digital revolution often obscures underlying contradictions and failures. Despite promises of convenience and scalability, initiatives like *Aadhaar* often exacerbate disparities and inefficiencies, particularly for marginalised communities.

The state's active fostering and subsidising of technology start-ups have complicated the landscape, blurring the boundaries between public and private interests.

India's rapid digital transformation, underscored by the proliferation of technology startups and digital infrastructure, highlights the symbiotic relationship between the state and entrepreneurial ventures. The state's active fostering and subsidising of technology start-ups have complicated the landscape, blurring the boundaries between public and private interests. This convergence is epitomised by the Data Protection Act,[29] which grants special exemptions to startups as data fiduciaries, a departure from global data governance norms.

The concept of 'DreamWork' elucidates the fusion of fantasy and productivity inherent in India's digital infrastructure projects. These projects articulate visions of digital and financial inclusion while consolidating state control over data and governance. Despite its neoliberal facade, the digital architecture reinforces centralised state authority, shaping the contours of future possibilities.

Regional variations in digital infrastructure implementation underscore the heterogeneity of surveillance practices. Initiatives like the Rajasthan Stack[30] exemplify attempts to localise digital governance frameworks, albeit with limited practical implementation.

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[29] 'Salient Features of the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 9 August 2023, https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1947264#:~:text=The%20Bill%20 provides%20for%20the,connected%20therewith%20or%20incidental%20thereto.

[30] 'The First Ever India Stack Developer Conference to be organized in New Delhi tomorrow', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 24 January 2023, https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1893299#:~:text=He%20 said%20India%20Stack%20is,governance%2Dat%20a%20population%20scale.

The persistence of these initiatives in public discourse highlights the performative nature of statehood in the digital age.

On a broad level, the convergence of state surveillance, technology and entrepreneurial ventures in India exemplifies a unique form of digital governance that defies conventional narratives of neoliberalism or governmentality. Moving forward, as India navigates its digital future, understanding the material and speculative dimensions of data will be crucial.

Stately Bodies in South Asia

The extent to which the state governs the body and the ways in which the people are strictly ungovernable are important markers of understanding the state's interactions with its people.

Stately bodies comprise an important yet under-discussed aspect of the state in South Asia. The extent to which the state governs the body and the ways in which the people are strictly ungovernable are important markers of understanding the state's interactions with its people. These boundaries are increasingly becoming more blurred, and the question of how far the stately bodies should step into governing citizens is becoming an important point of discussion.

This chapter discusses two key issues pertaining to stately bodies:

1.   The policing of young men in the Bangladesh-India borderlands, emphasising the gendered dynamics and security perceptions that shape border governance; and

2.   The evolving dynamics of traffic governance in Hyderabad (India), focusing on the state-citizen relations within traffic management and the balance between enforcement and trust-building.

While these issues highlight the distinct complexities of border security and urban citizenship, their common focus lies in underscoring the need for more inclusive and equitable approaches to governance.

Policing of Young Men in the Bangladesh-India Borderlands

Issues of mobility and security form an integral part of states' interactions with the people at the borders and the borderlands. While both sides insist that the Indian-Bangladesh border is friendly (unlike the highly militarised and active India-Pakistan border), an ethnographic study of the region reveals that this is far from the reality.[31] India has been militarising its side of the border since the

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[31] Sahana Ghosh, *A Thousand Tiny Cuts: Mobility and Security Across the Bangladesh-India Borderlands* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023).

1980s through the presence of security forces as well as infrastructure along the border. However, this is not matched in volume or density by the Bangladeshi side.

Over the years, there has been a stark transformation of the formerly connected region (through kinship and commerce) on account of post-colonial bordering. Bordering is an active and ongoing process, and this has resulted in the increasing disconnection and severance of ties within the region. Today, the landscape is marked by barriers, surveillance and a pervasive sense of securitisation. Moving away from the structural architecture of borders, which is shaped primarily through fencing, the policing practices concerning young men in the India-Bangladesh Borderlands are complex and multifaceted as they intersect with gender dynamics and security perceptions.

Central to the analysis is the construction of threats and the policing of mobility, particularly targeting young men engaged in border economies. Media discourses and state narratives often portray these men as deviant and dangerous, perpetuating stereotypes of masculinity and criminality. The figure of the 'illegal migrant' looms large in these discourses, especially in India, where there is a popular consensus around militarising and closing the border with Bangladesh to prevent perceived threats posed by Bangladeshi Muslim males. This narrative not only stigmatises young men living in the Borderlands but also justifies aggressive security measures.

Media discourses and state narratives often portray these men as deviant and dangerous, perpetuating stereotypes of masculinity and criminality.

Moreover, the policing of gendered threats reinforces militarised masculinities within the state apparatus. Both the Indian Border Security Force and the Bangladeshi Border Guards adopt aggressive security measures, framing border security as a matter of national pride and protection. This militarised approach not only targets individuals but also shapes the gendered identities of the states themselves. The performance of militarised masculinity serves to legitimise state power and control in the Borderlands while also perpetuating narratives of national security and sovereignty.

By challenging dominant narratives and recognising the intersectionality of gender, security and mobility, policymakers must move to develop more effective and equitable approaches to border governance.

However, this approach comes at a cost, as it marginalises vulnerable populations and exacerbates gender inequalities. By framing border security as a masculine endeavour, states reinforce patriarchal norms and exclude women and other marginalised groups from security discourse and decision-making processes. Thus, there is a need for the re-evaluation of security strategies that are more inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of border residents. By challenging dominant narratives and recognising the intersectionality of gender, security and mobility, policymakers must move to develop more effective and equitable approaches to border governance. Ultimately, promoting human security and social justice in the Borderlands requires a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics at play, including the gendered implications of border policing practices.

Traffic, State Authority and Urban Citizenship in India

The evolving dynamics of traffic governance offer a vantage point into the role of stately bodies and the idea of urban citizenship in India. Situating these factors through an ethnographic study of the experience in the Indian metropolis Hyderabad aids in understanding the everyday interactions of the citizens with the state, especially in terms of the blurred boundaries on the extent of governability of bodies.

Immersing in the experiences of state actors and civilians elucidates the nuanced dynamics shaping state-citizen relations within traffic management. It brings to light three prevailing orientalist narratives in the existing discourse about traffic regulation. The first is the perception of traffic rules as discretionary guidelines, where adherence may vary based on contextual factors such as convenience or perceived risk of enforcement. This perception reflects a complex interplay between societal norms, individual behaviours and the efficacy of regulatory mechanisms. The second is the cultural valorisation of rule-breaking which contributes to a broader narrative that may undermine the legitimacy of traffic regulations and enforcement efforts. This cultural dimension intersects with notions of autonomy, social status and notions of resistance against perceived injustices or inefficiencies

in governance. The third is the consequent impact on public safety. The tensions between individual liberties, collective safety and state authority underscore the intricate balancing act required in managing urban mobility.

Despite the adoption of smart policing strategies and technology integration for surveillance and regulation, concerns regarding privacy and public reception complicate the narrative surrounding these measures.[32] Apprehensions extend to how body-worn cameras and digital enforcement mechanisms monitor and regulate citizen behaviour, shaping narratives surrounding disorderly conduct.

Another important factor is the construction and maintenance of traffic authorities' image and legitimacy. There is also a need to strike a balance between incentivising compliance and enforcing punitive measures for non-adherence. Notably, this can be achieved through a multifaceted approach that combines incentives, rewards and educational campaigns, with enforcement actions such as fines and penalties. Beyond these, issues such as disparities in social treatment and the influence of social media on public discourse also feed directly into narratives pertaining to traffic laws.

There is also a need to strike a balance between incentivising compliance and enforcing punitive measures for non-adherence.

Further, the evolving role of traffic enforcement personnel emphasises the intricate dynamics of authority and compliance within urban contexts. In the case of Hyderabad, traffic police officers were found to receive periodic training but were often instructed to focus on enforcing a select few traffic rules that are more visible, where the selective reinforcement of rules is influenced by the preferences of the top police officer.

Additionally, the concept of shame is also used as a tool for traffic regulation. For instance, motorists not wearing helmets are presented with flowers and filmed for local television. Such decisions by the

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31 Suchitra Vijayan, 'E-policing in Hyderabad: Digitization and Surveillance', The Polis Project, 2 December 2021, https://www.thepolisproject.com/watch/e-policing-in-hyderabad-digitization-and-surveillance/.

stately body underscore the importance of balancing enforcement with the cultivation of trust and credibility among citizens.

In conclusion, the examination of traffic governance offers insight into the multifaceted interplay between state authority, technological advancements and public perception. The complexities of traffic regulations, enforcement practices and societal attitudes amplify the need to address the challenges in managing urban mobility. Doing so would help states move towards their goal of creating safer, more orderly roads that can help enhance the overall quality of urban life for residents and commuters alike.

Conclusion

The issues discussed in this special report are about the everyday experiences of the state in South Asia. The different chapters and various case studies discussed within them offer invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics of governance beyond formal institutional structures. By looking at how individuals navigate encounters with state institutions in their daily lives, a deeper understanding of state-citizen relations can be reached.

These insights are of academic and policy value and warrant further and in-depth research. Policymakers can design more responsive and effective governance mechanisms by identifying shortcomings and areas for improvement in state-citizen interactions. Moreover, highlighting how state institutions and practices can reinforce the marginalisation and exclusion of certain groups of society can empower citizens to actively participate in governance processes and demand greater transparency, responsiveness and accountability. Together, these would strengthen the democratic fabric in these countries and ultimately, foster peace and stability in the region.

By looking at how individuals navigate encounters with state institutions in their daily lives, a deeper understanding of state-citizen relations can be reached.

Appendix
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