

India's Taste for Violence: Globalisation Beyond Commercialisation

Written by Deep K. Datta-Ray

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/17/indias-taste-for-violence-globalisation-beyond-commercialisation/>

DEEP K. DATTA-RAY, AUG 17 2023

This article is part of the Indian IR Meets Global IR series, edited by Deepshikha Shahi and Raghav Dua

Globalisation is hopelessly parochial for being a by-product of European Liberalism. Dealing with a plethora of concerns including the dichotomy between individual and societal rights, Liberalism balances them via interests and contracts (see Chapters 2 and 3 in Mill 2004). Used to create equivalences, states deploy them to calculate how to barter, maximise, or reduce, some interests to secure others. This makes for a commercial form of globalisation. Ironically, this globalisation is also antithetical to every state's primary interest: sovereignty. Commercialisation fragments sovereignty because interests make states dependent on each other. Dependency fosters equality as all states politick in terms of interest, but the price is high for states must hand over control to their contracting parties. Yet states willingly give up sovereignty because commercialisation is said to foster stability.

It is odd then that post-Cold War the votaries of globalisation as commercialisation, the Liberal West, NATO, kill more than any other country including China, Russia – or any other alliance (Datta-Ray 2018). This is because globalisation rides on offense (Locke 2003, 2.2.6) since interests and equivalences enable the calculation of the degree of violence required to secure interests. An instance of commercial politics is Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), which uses threats to safeguard interests to deliver stability. Paradoxically, the interested parties' very threatening to secure their interests is precisely what makes for instability: militarism and war. During the Cold War, Liberals waged proxy wars, but today they themselves kill and are killed, across the world (Dillon and Reid 2009).

Naturally, Liberals account for the paradox of globalisation as commercialisation triggering global chaos as originating outside commercial life. Rather than recognising globalisation is synonymous with instability, the logic of the market seeks to commercialise all life in a delusive hunt for stability. Commerce is therefore now not only the object, but its defence demands making it also the subject. The former is to create interconnected markets, but these are now being inserted into the ideas and concepts that organise us – to recreate us as globalised subjects.

A site for recreation is love which was once sublime, particularly unrequited love's interactions beyond interests and contracts and so exceeding reciprocity. Patently a threat to globalisation as commercialisation, love is denigrated early-on with the colonial phrase "going native". Post-colonial Europe continues commercialising love (Giddens 1992) to ensure it is limited to serving material interests, primarily, the sexual impulse. Interesting is not prostitution since it is largely *ad hoc* and illegal, but the West's fabrication at great cost a socio-legal web of tax-breaks and holidays to cage love in marriage and cohabitation contracts.

The intention, to contractually manufacture the transactional people who are globalisation's subjects. Ideally manufactured within the marriage contract, it is being rendered obsolete by religion's decline and LGBTQ's rise – hence cohabitation contracts to bring everyone in line with commercialised heterosexuality (In the US there are a multiplicity of such initiatives, most notably the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], see The Administration for Children and Families 2022, see also LII, n.d.; Seven EU countries offer marriage bonuses, while four offer cohabitation bonuses, see Christl, De Poli, Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė 2021). Its success is writ large in Europe's globalisation and attendant costs being mimicked. The newest agents, the Global South's poor fleeing poverty for the

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planet's most commercialised societies to become everything from academics to CEOs, but remaining *parvenue*.

Beyond globalisation as commercialisation

There have always been alternative imaginings of the 'Global', 'globality', and 'globalisation' uninterested in converting technicolour life into commercial monotone. Compelling is Mahatma Gandhi's globalisation for its theoretical rigor, and because it is everyday practice. Gandhi takes his globalisation from the ancient epic *Mahabharata* and uses it to craft an entirely new politics, *satyagraha* (political practice based on truth-force). That this is the practice of Indian diplomats, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and the Indian nation-state, denotes an abiding relevancy. Its full significance is reiterated time and again during my unique fieldwork within the MEA. It remains the only foreign ministry, if only under orders from the Executive, in this case Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, to permit an outsider such as myself, to live, and work to some extent, with diplomats, as well as publish a book, unfettered.

Moreover, the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) administration's attempt to overturn the teachings of Gandhi, only reiterates him while exposing commercialisation's logical vacuity. What this, along with the success of the triptych of individual, organisation, and state, makes for is a robustness and replicability, lacking elsewhere. In other words, Gandhi's rigorous theorisation in practice is what certifies his globalisation for wider consumption.

Gandhi is rigorous because he challenges with love, hatred's instabilities, that is, commercialisation's precursor, colonialism. His writings draw on the familiar, the *Mahabharata*, which he reads as a treatise on violence. He takes from the epic wholesale, the *dharma*-complex. It recognises every context regardless of its location in time or space possesses its own truth and therefore rationale for action and that all contexts are permeated by violence – for even life affirming processes rely on destruction, at the very least at the cellular level. Furthermore, the *dharma*-complex also states the rational actor manages violence, non-violently. In other words, Gandhi cannot hate, but only love.

In stark contrast to Europe's colonising of those it hates, and then emaciating love to contracting, Gandhi seeks out like a lover those violent towards him, to love them by freeing them from their hatred. It is this that makes for Gandhi's taste for violence, which he internalizes and converts, with love. In combination then, the *Mahabharata* makes for Gandhi's globalisation as a tapestry of contexts unique in every sense except that they all generate violence which rationally ought to be managed morally, that is non-violently. In short, with love.

Gandhi adopts the *Mahabharata's* globalisation but finds the epic cannot manage every violent context non-violently. That is why he builds on his epic learnings, to split violence into its forms, offensive and defensive. The difference between the two is not a matter of degree, but ontology. 'Offence' in its mildest form are the threats commercial politics such as MAD ride on because they begin with interests.

In contrast, globalisation is founded on disinterest which is evident in *satyagraha*. It allows the *satyagrahi* – practitioner of *satyagraha* – to extricate oneself from the dependency and contingency inherent to contracts and so offensive exercises of violence. Instead, Gandhi and millions of others absorb offense while not reproducing it. This is 'defence' and its chariot is not interests but sacrifice. Gandhi's defence therefore requires not the interested, but disinterested, actor. Only the latter is willing to love those attacking them to the point that they sacrifice themselves!

The ontological difference extends to the demands of disinterestedness. It tends to tip the *satyagrahi* over to giving up even self-interest for the ultimate sacrifice, dying. While death is repugnant to commercialisation since its intention is to secure, not sacrifice, interests, *satyagraha* is contingent on the practitioner preserving oneself as a repository of the truth that is the *dharma*-complex. After all, the *satyagrahi's* death betrays the truth, by leaving no one to defend against the offensive. Hence, the interested calculates in terms of violence to preserve oneself, the disinterested cannot and so requires courage. This is not to say that commercial agents are not courageous, but the disinterested requires courage to seek out violence, absorb it, and not reply violently. So radically different and demanding is this courage that to learn it Gandhi even turns to a Third Reich SS Colonel sent by Adolf Hitler to British India (Datta-Ray 2015, 193-230).

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Globalisation in practice

Indian diplomats find courage in love which is why they do not attack, but defend (at great cost) against the everyday offenses their lives are riddled with. Such practices make explicit that at least at the local level, the tune is not commercialisation but globalisation and its handmaiden, love. That it permeates life at the local lived level, is evident in the biography of a typical diplomat. Noteworthy is that despite repeatedly bearing the costs of defence, he perseveres with globalisation, for he seeks out like a lover, those who hate him, so to become a part of their society and in doing so, convert them. Indeed, his ultimate aim is to not just be a part of society but lead it, as a politician.

The first marker of the diplomat's *habitus* being violence is his parent's combined monthly salary in the mid-1990s being USD 130. This supports four people, putting them at the World Bank's poverty line of one US dollar per day. The reality of hovering around the poverty line is discernible in not their eschewing luxury, but what they consider luxury: bus travel. The violence he faces is also geographic, linguistic, and educational. Born in the 1980s, his district is scarred by insurgency: 50,000 out of 1,200,000 live in concentration camps. He first watches television aged 18 in the third town he lives in and accesses, despite near impenetrable forest, via a recent road "impossible" to traverse during the monsoons. He attends three schools because his village has just primary education. His mother is however "very special" for being literate and from "a better, plains family where there were schools." She brings formal education to her husband's village. Before her the "school [was] on paper" (since the official funding is stolen). Just 10 to 20 percent of his village's children transition into secondary school because there are no teachers for the alien language of instruction: Hindi. However, he seeks out the violence of having to learn in a foreign language, and to do so gambles his family's scant resources only to sacrifice it all, for even though he gets into secondary school, it has no teachers. Hence a third school, which only lacks science teachers. Out of 90,000 people in his "home-place", he is just "the sixth person" to complete school. He graduates because he taught himself while living as a "paying guest in the house of a friend of a friend."

He now aspires to university despite knowing it will be violent. Its first form is simply getting the application form. He asks the bus driver (who comes once a day from the nearest town, 12 hours away) to fetch it but the driver keeps changing, so he never gets it. Nevertheless, he perseveres and, as he expects, is subjected to racial, or caste, violence. Inevitably, physical abuse follows, culminating in his ejection from the hostel. Yet again, offense incites in him the courage to seek out offense while not mimicking it. "I decided to take it as a challenge," he says and pays the price: loss of "self-esteem" because he is ostracised. Finally, he gets a job, but spurred on by a will to eradicate suffering, he gains admission to a postgraduate course. Yet again, he gambles all and sacrifices everything. Having to pay the fees in advance, combined with his position at the bottom of global society means he "needed a loan and had to apply from my home-place. That meant taking leave from work. I went to my village and was told that to apply ... I had to go to the district HQ; there they didn't know anything. But having exceeded my leave, I lost my job" (Datta-Ray 2015, 50-60). Reiterating his love for those waging violence on him is that all of this is conveyed without resignation, much less hatred.

This diplomat's reckless love is possible because underpinning it is globalisation, not commercialisation. That the former is the leitmotif of his organisation is apparent in the MEA's love. In the first instance, this is the willingness to put itself in harm's way by loving those totally different to itself. Beginning as an elite society, the MEA chooses to hazard itself by incorporating people from the bottom of global society through longstanding policies of positive discrimination. Founded on classifications of destitution, the barriers to entry are lowered for, literally, the other half. Because of the constitution and legislation, the MEA is no longer the playground of former princes and the *Ingabanga* -Anglicised Bengalis (Datta-Ray 2005, 77-89). They aspired to the MEA because it was the "last bastion of the brown *sahib*," where the non-Anglicised were "despised and kept at a distance to avoid offending the prime responsibilities of their masters." Knowing this, Nehru slots royals into the IFS to provide "psychological and political rehabilitation for erstwhile rulers," writes the man dissolving the princely order (Datta-Ray 2015, 55). By the 1960s, numbered are the days of royals like the Maharajah of Alirajpur who as High Commissioner to Singapore acquires a reputation for "messing things up" (Datta-Ray 2009, 125-9).

The MEA's love is statistically stark. In 2014, the beneficiaries of positive discrimination constituted 37 per cent of MEA staff and are rising. One metric to gauge what this means is the decline of English. That it was *de facto* long out

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of use is belatedly noted in a 2010 newspaper report which with alacrity is headlined, "Lessons in English for today's diplomats" (Anon. 2010). This is not a trend but the reality, as is the chastisement the MEA receives for changing itself. In 2016, the MEA was upbraided for its incompetence in English by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs. Yet in truly Gandhian style, the MEA persists and so invites the wrath of its superiors.

The demographic, social, and cultural changes, the MEA inflicts upon itself is commendably democratic, but also denotes globalisation and so love in a deeper sense. Not only are the inductees different to what the MEA was at independence, but they are diverse to the extreme, within themselves. People bereft of friends from another religion, prohibited from eating with another caste member, barred from socialising, let alone marrying, or loving, across either line, are integrated into the MEA and so are now doing things once beyond the pale. Astoundingly all this is without offense for there is no contracting. Indeed, to delete contracting, its fount, history, is undone at the MEA. How, begins to appear in the MEA presenting three different origin stories about itself. Rather than dismiss this as a failure of a people who famously do not do history, a diplomat explains by saying:

You see, we are secular. So a secular history cannot create a timeline going back further. We are so riven with all kinds of things but we are here. This kind of story then becomes the best way of ... you know ... maybe of not causing any problems [today]. ... So for the purposes of an introduction it worked.

The officer notes all three origins lie within the colonial archive and draws on it to use the word "secular", but it is not used in the European sense of offense, that is the imposition of a *dispositif* to steamroller out difference, but as a celebration of difference that cannot be contracted.

In other words, secularism is not the violence of imposition, of markets, religion, or anything, via contract with violent participants, but the avoidance of violence altogether by the maintenance of difference. Moreover, rather than mine the past to create interests today the MEA plays fast and loose with it not willy-nilly but to secure the present to create a completely new understanding of secular. In doing so, the MEA reproduces Gandhi's notion of a violent cosmos managed non-violently. Instead of managing the violence of its denizens with more violence, the MEA refutes the very history from where interests arise to manufacture a space devoid of contracting (Datta-Ray 2018, 140-156) and so capable of love.

That individual and organisational harmonization with globalisation continues to the level of the state is clear from even a cursory perusal of India's foreign policy. Two of its most significant aspects are the existential threat of instant nuclear annihilation and death by a thousand cuts inflicted by terrorism. Once again, the practices of the individual and organisation are repeated at the state. That it practices *satyagraha* at the level of international politics is what makes globalisation local, internal, and global.

The tale of India's nuclear *satyagraha* has often been recited. A watershed is the Cold War's very Liberal nuclear policy of MAD being introduced to South Asia by China's developing and testing the bomb in 1964. For India, Beijing's action is offensive because New Delhi fixed the atom to a peaceful register with the 1948 Atomic Energy Act. Significantly, to manage Beijing's, and all subsequent acts of nuclear aggression, New Delhi eschews entanglement in MAD's relentless pursuit of more bombs to instead shun interests altogether and so court annihilation. Till now, India does not match its opponent's aggression and so there is no resorting to interests let alone using them to calculate. Indeed, India seeks out aggression in terms reminiscent of the *Mahabharata*. New Delhi notes contexts produce violence but does not repeat it to stem it. Hence, New Delhi opens itself to nuclear blackmail by remaining weaker, but nevertheless steadfastly stands up to blackmail without repeating or acceding to its accompanying demands. Such international relations are only possible because the dynamo is globalisation as violence and its avoidance, regardless of context.

New Delhi does weaponize, but to maintain *satyagraha* for the decision recognises changes in India's context of violence and meets it defensively. The change is the illegal arming of Pakistan and its weaponizing, as well as contradictions in China's NFU policy from the 1980s. "Very often one finds strategists arguing abstractly in favour of first strikes in conventional and nuclear war, even while claiming that China is committed to a second strike posture," comments an American analyst (Datta-Ray 2015, 247). In this matrix of nuclear instability, escalation, dissemination,

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illegality, and deception, India becomes a nuclear weapons state, discloses it promptly, and continues its posture of weakness by implementing policies of No First Use (NFU) and Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD). These steps attest to the core of policy change being an abiding concern with defence. *Satyagraha* continues because India sacrifices itself by choosing to live in the shadow of nuclear extermination since NFU and CMD ensure Indian weapons do not deter the commercialised disciples of MAD (Datta-Ray 2021a).

Satyagraha and its underlying globality is not limited to abstract policy-making but organises the messy reality of everyday international relations. In South Asia, that is the relentless terrorism Pakistan inflicts upon India daily at the border, occasionally in the heartlands, and its deadening to meaningless by India. Central to this is India not seeking a proportionate or disproportionate response to Pakistani offensiveness. It is so when Pakistan occupies the heights of Kargil and even for the 2001 terror attack on India's parliament, the *Lok Sabha*. What is required though is courage. It enables the sacrificing of soldiers, but not for offense. Only to take back what India regards as its own which also denudes whatever meaning Pakistan attaches to its offenses. The courage behind Kargil's defence is called upon again during and after the 2001 *Lok Sabha* attack because of the symbolic intensity of the offense. India does find the courage, over several months, which is why there is no escalation, much less to nuclear war.

In other words, the courage to routinely sacrifice a few lives at the border, and even the homeland proper, means India consistently retains control. Indeed, so intently does India retain control that every so often it conducts cross-border raids. They remind one-and-all the extent of New Delhi's defence, quantifiable in the regularity of its sacrificing of soldiers. *Satyagraha* at the state level also highlights an unrivalled ability to uphold sovereignty. Unlike commercialisation and its contracting which splits sovereignty, for Gandhi and all *satyagrahis* their sovereignty is always intact for they do not rely on interests and so do not contract. The cost, as India's foreign policy shows though, is courage. It is necessary given *satyagraha's* taste for violence. It denotes love, for just like the diplomat and the MEA, the state too seeks out like a lover those intent on destroying it while leaving itself exposed to convert them from offense.

Commercialisation's last stand

India's first offensive action marks commercialisation's last stand for the former exposes the latter's illogicality as well as globalisation's permanence. The action is the BJP's airstrike against Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM) terrorist camps in Pakistan's Balakot region in 2019. The only strike ever by a nuclear power against another nuclear power's homeland, it is best explained not by analysts (Datta-Ray 2021) but by its architect National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval. His explanation of his approach is recorded for general consumption and is instructive precisely because it is littered with irregularities and spliced with disfluencies and fillers, common to *Hinglish*.

The NSA says he aspires to ensure India's "civilizational values and culture remain intact" and he engages in three modes: "defensive... if somebody comes here we will prevent him, we will defend . . . defensive-offense, to defend ourselves we will go to the place from where the offense is coming from . . . offensive mode where you go outright." He also adds the "nuclear threshold is a difficulty in the offensive mode but not in the defensive-offense," because, "you (Pakistan) may do one Mumbai, you will lose Balochistan . . . there is no nuclear war involved in that . . . there is no engagement of troops . . . if you know the tricks, we know the tricks better than you" (Datta-Ray 2022, 223-240).

Balakot confirms the NSA is tricky and comprehensively undermines him, for the day after there is escalation: the two militaries clash. The NSA's error is not his context of violence, directly inherited from Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi and earlier, the *Mahabharata*. The error is breaking that intellectual integrity making for a disinterested defence to possibly death, by replacing it with an interested BJP offensively securing its interests. They are created, used to calculate equivalencies, to threaten or kill, to realise interests. The shift from defence then is grounded in violence but managed commercially. This insertion of interest into a conceptualisation disinterested at conception is the illogicality and reiterates that regardless of intention, commercialisation inevitably equals violence. But even this illogicality retells Gandhi's globalisation, affirming violence is a cosmological phenomenon.

The cost of the NSA's errors is not just the risk of immediate escalation to nuclear war, but also the long-term enhancing of violence globally. Moreover, in calculating to cause offense the BJP does what no Indian government

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has done. The BJP equates India with Pakistan – to calculate a more offensive response to Pakistani offensiveness – and surrenders New Delhi's sovereignty to Islamabad because it now dictates what India does. Control is handed over to Islamabad, putting it in charge of the future for the first time. That Pakistan does not escalate despite no longer being denied the opportunity to do so by India's defence, for India is no longer defensive, testifies to Islamabad's ability to control itself in a manner impossible for the BJP. Indeed, Islamabad exercises a self-restraint almost equal to what New Delhi practiced prior to Balakot. Yet, given Islamabad's history of offense, this is scant consolation.

With its clear costs and risks, why is the BJP breaking the integrity of Gandhi's globalisation/globality/understanding of the Global? The answer cannot be the aftermath of instability, and so must reside in the act. Defining it is sacrifice's eschewal delivering immediate gratification for the BJP. The BJP's offense relieved it of mustering the courage the emaciated half-naked fakir did, and the rest of India does. Yet NFU, CMD, and countless such policies founded in globalisation and consistently generating love beyond Europe's and the United States' emaciated conceptions, continues and so affects all the countries India deals with. Love, as the fieldwork demonstrates, also suffuses the practices of Indians and their organisations within the state. This excess of love both within and without India is what confirms the BJP is not India, globalisation is not commercialisation, and the extent of love's handmaiden: the taste for violence.

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About the author:

Deep K. Datta-Ray is a Visiting Senior Fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He is the only outsider to conduct fieldwork in a foreign ministry. His primary interest is the management of violence in the international politics of India and China, and the academic violence of scholars themselves. A related interest is in non-Western ways, not as a nativist collector of things strange but only when they define and motivate things that matter, such as bureaucracies and countries. Prior to academia, he worked for the business consultancies Kroll in Mumbai, and Hakluyt in Singapore. He can be reached at: dattaray@gmail.com.