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The Caste of Diplomacy

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Summary

What does caste have to do with diplomacy? This special issue is an effort to guide discussions more systematically in thinking through the relationship between caste and diplomacy and, more specifically, Indian diplomacy. Accordingly, this introductory article lays out the reasons for interrogating Indian diplomacy through the prism of caste and reveals the ways in which diplomacy as a site has remained an exclusively upper caste space. In an effort towards de-sacralizing diplomacy, we look towards *Begumpura*, a utopia that provides space for an alternative tradition of ‘anti-diplomacy’.

Keywords

Indian diplomacy – caste – international relations – Ambedkar

1 Introduction¹

What does caste have to do with diplomacy? This is a question that even well-meaning colleagues have asked us. Afterall, caste is – in international relations (IR) terminology – a ‘domestic’ issue. The vast scholarship on gender – and to some extent now, race – and IR has alerted us to the constitutive role of the social milieu of those who engage in thinking (academics), practising (diplomats) and shaping (policymakers) international politics.² And yet, caste has rarely been a category of sustained analysis even in critical and/or postcolonial interventions in these disciplines. Given that the specialist scholarship on Indian diplomacy and IR has tended to produce what the historian Chinniah Jangam has termed ‘caste-blind narratives’, such an absence is perhaps unsurprising.³

Caste, as Gajendran Ayyathurai calls it, is ‘a social disorder’, a system that segregates Indian society into high and low categories.⁴ While we will expand below on the ways in which caste differs from the categories with which it is often compared – notably, race and class – it is worth noting that caste is no more an institution limited to India or South Asia. Although primarily a part of Hindu society, caste has been rendered a global institution by a 35.4 million strong diaspora, the largest in the world, spread across 203 countries,⁵ in a way predicted by Bhimrao Ambedkar, the foremost figure of anti-caste resistance, as early as 1916.⁶ However, this has repercussions not only for the casteist forms in which societal discriminations are perpetuated abroad, but also for the political and legal infrastructures associated with diversity and discrimination in these countries.⁷ At a more abstract level, as we argue below, caste provides

1 We are grateful to the editors of the journal for creating a space for this special issue. In particular, our eternal gratitude is to Deepak Nair who shepherded this effort through each stage of the process and to Jan Melissen for every encouragement possible. Two small grants, one from *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* and another from Leiden University Faculty of Humanities, allowed us to organize a workshop in May 2023. Crystal Ennis was most helpful in securing the latter. We also admiringly acknowledge the many anonymous reviewers who engaged with these pieces in a constructive and collegial but ultimately rigorous manner. Finally, our thanks go to all the participants of the workshop, some of whom appear in these pages as authors.

2 All three categories involve in some ways in thinking, practising and shaping international politics; we only suggest these as their respective primary function.

3 Jangam, 2016, 2017.

4 Ayyathurai 2021.

5 See <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>.

6 Ambedkar 2023, 18.

7 Mégret and Dutta 2022; Yadav 2021.

both a logic of pecking orders as well as a justificatory vocabulary of hierarchy in IR and diplomacy in their preoccupation with status, power, prestige and stigma as definitive to the international order.

This special issue is an effort to guide discussions more systematically in thinking through the relationship between caste and diplomacy; more specifically, Indian diplomacy. It makes two key interventions: first, it highlights the centrality of caste in the making and practice of Indian diplomacy; and second, it foregrounds the caste-inflected nature of discourse in IR and diplomatic studies.

2 Defining Caste

The caste system is a system of social stratification associated primarily with the Hindu religion.⁸ A person is born into one of the four varnas – *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *shudra* – which are arranged in a hierarchical fashion with brahmin at the top and shudra at the bottom. Traditionally, a person's profession and social status were determined by their caste group. Brahmins performed educational and priestly functions; kshatriyas undertook all functions related to political rule such as war and fighting, governance and administration; vaishyas were the merchants and traders; and shudras were those who performed all the labour in agriculture and households. Outside of the four varnas were a fifth category of *ati-shudras*, outcastes or *dalits*; that is, those who performed the most menial tasks in society and had no access to land, resources and public spaces. In most cases, a person's caste status remains fixed for the duration of their life.⁹

The social reformer and political leader Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891–1956), also fondly called Baba Saheb and revered as a saviour by dalits for his lifelong quest for social justice, famously described the caste system as 'graded inequality' with 'an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt'.¹⁰

8 Historical origins of the caste system are mired in uncertainty because there are no textual sources that point to its birth. Untouchability and the caste system were prevalent in Hindu society when they were outlined in the *Manusmriti*, a text dated between the second and third century CE. See Yengde 2025, 1–21.

9 While some form of fluidity between caste orders existed in precolonial South Asia in contrast to notions of a fixed, timeless caste system, Divya Cherian's important recent intervention points to the limits of any such fluidity: the figure of the 'Untouchable' would always remain so, 'marking the core of the always excluded' and thereby defining the bounds of caste. Cherian 2023, 2.

10 Ambedkar 1991, 410.

In other words, it is a system of double movement: the higher you go, the status and power increases; the lower you go, the contempt and dispossession increases. Caste operates as a systemic barrier that shapes an individual's social position, limits their life choices due to structural inequalities and restricts their access to political, economic and social opportunities. Caste is also defined by an affective and embodied politics of touch, purity and pollution, spatially and physically segregating 'untouchables' and their brahminical others to 'guard the frontier of acceptable social relations'.¹¹ These discriminatory practices are not only oppressive but also reinforce the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in positions of power and resource distribution. By excluding large sections of society, caste weakens the social fabric and diminishes collective progress; indeed, Ambedkar condemned it as 'anti-national'.¹²

In order to assist with overcoming the caste barriers that hindered the social, political, economic and educational mobility of caste-oppressed groups, the Ambedkar-drafted Indian Constitution made special provisions to reserve seats in state-funded institutions for those from oppressed castes (dalits) as well as from indigenous populations, also called *adivasis*. The Constitution referred to them as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), respectively, and they were granted 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent representation. However, this meant that another discriminated group, the shudras, continued to be classed with the remaining three, socially dominant upper castes. This was corrected in the early 1990s, when the shudras, now categorized as 'Other Backward Castes' (OBCs), were granted 27 per cent reservation in government positions. However, by any reasonable estimates, this is a severe underrepresentation, as the OBC population is expected to be double that number.¹³

Debates on caste have often focused on the relationship between status and power, ideology and empirical reality. The sociologist Louis Dumont, inspired by French structuralism, defined caste in terms of ritual status, fashioning caste as primarily a matter of purity and pollution. Caste hierarchy for him drew on scriptural authority (ideology) which presumed a hierarchy of ritual status. The brahmins were at the top of the hierarchy because of their ritually pure status;

11 Lee 2021, 314.

12 Constituent Assembly of India Debates 1949; Ambedkar 2014, 23–96.

13 A key demand of OBC groups has been a caste census, which was last conducted in 1931, and showed the OBCs to be nearly 51 per cent. Only recently has the Indian government accepted this demand. The state of Bihar in India conducted a caste census recently which showed that the 'upper castes' make up only 15.5 per cent of the entire Bihar population, and the reserved category population (OBC, SC and ST) amounts to 85 percent. See Times of India 2023.

the power the brahmins accumulated was only a result of this status. The out-castes (or dalits) were the impure/polluted and were at the bottom end of the status hierarchy. Power, for Dumont, was subservient to status.¹⁴

In a range of responses from sociologists, historians and anthropologists and indeed Dalit activists and thinkers, Dumont's arguments have been critiqued for a frozen (and pro-brahmin) conception of caste. Indeed, as Gerald Berreman argues, power and status are often two sides of the same coin. As an empirical, lived reality, the caste system is an assertion of differential power that is expressed through ritual status. In other words, in everyday life situations, caste operates through 'power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honour and denigration, plenty and want, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety',¹⁵

Hence, caste discrimination is not merely about the question of purity and pollution (although it is an important element). So, if one went searching for caste through an archaic understanding of caste in modern institutions, one may not find it. Indeed, modern institutions display their casteism through enunciations of meritocratic castelessness.¹⁶

Moving beyond essentialist notions of caste as a static, uniquely Indian or South Asian category, scholars have foregrounded its lived realities as 'a system of domination and power, which produced deprivations and material inequalities' and increasingly emphasized its global ramifications.¹⁷ Comparative analyses of caste and other categories like race and class have been a key avenue for such conversations; take, for instance, the postwar debates over a 'racial caste studies' framework for understanding American society or more nuanced, recent approaches to examining racialization and racial capitalism in India that insist 'on the situated entanglements between brahmanism, coloniality and global capitalism'.¹⁸ While there is increasing attention paid to the politics of comparison and the limits of simplistic caste/race analogies, it is worth asserting that many of these comparative approaches are informed by the longstanding transnational solidarities and shared struggles of African American and dalit activists (we turn to this later in the article). Such a history has informed the efforts of dalit activists to raise awareness about caste discrimination (what they termed a 'hidden apartheid') through the discourse of anti-

14 Dumont 1980.

15 Berreman 1971, 20.

16 Subrahmanian 2019.

17 Jodhka and Naudet 2023, 5.

18 On American sociological debates over caste, see Yengde, 2022 and 2024. On racialization and its intersections with caste in India, see Cháirez-Garza et al. 2021, 197.

racism and human rights at the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance at Durban.¹⁹

While Indian diplomats (and some sociologists) predictably rejected such a comparison and ensured that caste discrimination would not be included within the formal agenda of the conference, dalit activists raised international awareness and visibility precisely due to their use of a comparative vocabulary that intertwined caste and race. As Meena Dhanda has noted, what is at stake in these comparisons is 'the intellectual and political consensus necessary to move towards action – to bring about an institutional or social change'.²⁰ This is certainly true of the recent efforts of anti-caste activists in the South Asian diaspora who have, in many cases, successfully lobbied to ensure legal protection against caste discrimination abroad.²¹ Scholars of caste too are increasingly locating it as a global category of analysis: see Suraj Yengde's focus on 'global castes' or the new open access journal *J-Caste*, which defines itself as 'A Global Journal on Social Exclusion' that encourages the study of 'the marginalization and inter-generational oppression of religious, racial and cultural minorities throughout the world'.²²

Despite these wide-ranging examples of the internationalization of caste and the intersections between anti-caste and anti-racist activism, scholars of diplomatic studies and IR have rarely regarded these debates as central to their fields. Indeed, even while there has been increasing attention to race and colonialism as constitutive elements in the making of the international order, there is little equivalent focus on caste as a key framework that brings to light hierarchy, marginalization and resistance across international contexts. This is perhaps unsurprising given that works focused on Indian diplomacy and IR have largely deemed caste to be outside of their purview.

3 Caste and Indian Diplomacy

In 1979, a 30-member parliamentary committee carried out an audit of the representation of those from oppressed castes and tribes – constitutionally identified as SCs and STs – in India's foreign service. The figures for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) were uncomplimentary. In Group A, which included the

19 Berg 2018 and Dhanda 2024.

20 Dhanda 2024, 1241.

21 In 2023, Seattle became the first American city to legislate against caste discrimination.

22 Yengde 2022. *J-Caste* is an Open Access journal published in association with the Brandeis Library <https://journals.library.brandeis.edu/index.php/caste/about>.

elite Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers, a total of only 10.7 per cent people were from the SCs and STs.²³ This was well below the then constitutionally mandated requirement of 17.5 per cent of affirmative action requirement in public services (12.5 per cent SCs and 5 per cent STs). However, it appears that the representation of SCs and STs was still better within the middle echelons of IFS; that is, the IFS B cadre (Group B) which comprised of secretarial positions. The percentage of SCs and STs in IFS (B) more than halved to just 5.1 per cent. Furthermore, in contrast to the middle and upper echelons of the Ministry, including in its foreign missions, 97 per cent of the sweepers – in fact, everyone barring one – on the MEA's payroll were from the SC category.²⁴

The question then to ask is: How is it conceivable that even three decades after independence, in positions that were reserved through affirmative action, the divide between what Ambedkar had identified as *Puruskrt Bharat* and *Bahushkrut Bharat* (rewarded India and discarded India) was still as stark?

This may have been a damning statistic but one that was neither exceptional in the history of the Indian foreign ministry, nor was it fully reflective of upper-caste dominance. The parliamentary committee went on to note several discreet and indiscreet practices through which the foreign ministry undermined the Indian government's prescriptions on caste representation. For instance, a staggeringly large number of key posts were simply excluded from reservation requirements.²⁵ Out of 249 such positions in IFS, only six people, in IFS B only one out of 42 people and among the researchers within the MEA only four persons out of 144 were from SCs/STs.²⁶ On average, therefore, wherever reservation criteria were lifted, the chance of a non-upper-caste individual being recruited for IFS and IFS B was less than three per cent.

23 The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are groups defined as disadvantaged in the Indian Constitution. The Scheduled Caste includes dalits and the Scheduled Tribes refers to the various indigenous communities, or adivasis (constituting about 8 per cent of Indian population).

24 Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, 1977–1978, 50.

25 Reservation orders were not applicable to the following: i) Grades I to IV of the IFS; ii) research posts; iii) staff in the offices of the Ministers; iv) posts in legal and treaties division; v) posts in the Bureau of Security; vi) interpreters; vii) staff in hospitality organizations; and viii) other isolated posts. See Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, 1977–1978, 3.

26 These numbers are comparable to pre-mandatory reservation phase (before 1962). In April 1962, an official memorandum stipulated that if not enough candidates from reserved categories were selected through the normal cut off, candidates who had qualified with lower positions in the examinations could be considered (see F. 551 (27) – GA, 1968, f. 1, National Archives of India (NAI), Delhi). In 1962, only five IFS officers among 211 were from the SC and ST category. See F. 551 (21) – GA, 1970, NAI.

Even if dalit and adivasi candidates could enter the services, it was rare for them to be promoted. Within the IFS, the higher one climbed the bureaucratic hierarchy, the less likely one was to find people from historically oppressed communities. Furthermore, several positions were de-reserved on the pretext of lack of suitable candidates. The committee found it alarming that within the MEA, there were no special provisions for training or otherwise for SC and ST candidates to improve their chances of promotion; neither were there any liaison officers to ensure compliance by the Ministry to the reservation orders.

Back in 1947, within a week of India's independence, the Indian government had issued a circular about reservations. On 21 August 1947, the Home Ministry asked all government departments, including the MEA, to encourage the representation of SCs/STs. Such recruitments were, however, made 'subject to the condition that candidates of requisite communities possessing the prescribed qualifications are forthcoming in sufficient numbers for the vacancies reserved for them.'²⁷ In other words, the onus was on SC and ST candidates to be qualified enough. In a country with merely 18 per cent literacy rate and an unbending historical tradition of education being restricted to just upper castes, it was a rare dalit candidate who would be eligible.²⁸

But even with education, it was clear that only a certain kind of individual was considered 'fit' for foreign service: one with knowledge of subjects such as international law, diplomacy and foreign affairs, proficiency in English (and proclivity towards idiomatic English, new recruits were sent to the United Kingdom and the United States to finetune it), ability to learn a foreign language and comfort with social manners of the upper class.²⁹ Not surprisingly, a disproportionately large section of early recruits was thus from social elites: those from foreign universities (where these subjects were taught), children of higher civil servants (thus sufficiently Anglicized)³⁰ and former princes. In fact, none of the officers drawn into the IFS from the Indian Civil Services and the Emergency Commission in transition years came from SCs/STs.³¹

The MEA made little effort to counter the ill-effects of this social privilege. On the contrary, it celebrated it. Several memoirs of Indian diplomats – sometimes

27 F. 16 (1) – FSP/47, MEA, f. 33, NAI.

28 India does not conduct a caste census, so it is difficult to know the percentage of educated untouchables. But Ambedkar's biography is a good indicator; he was almost always the only untouchable student in his school and college.

29 F. 6 (1) – FSP/47; 6(3) – FSP/47 and f. 6(4) – FSP/47: MEA, NAI.

30 Nearly half of IFS recruits in the first decade were children of civil servants (Subramaniam 1971, 55–67).

31 The only exceptions were people like K.R. Narayanan who were recruited through a Service Selection Board.

proudly, other times with post hoc wisdom – note the graded hierarchy within the services.³² T.N. Kaul argues that the IFS thought of themselves as a cut above other administrative services, as reflected in their mannerisms, methods and social conduct.³³ Even within the IFS, the colonial-era Indian Civil Service (ICS) occupied most positions above joint secretary level and it was only in 1976 that a non-ICS officer rose to the top rank of foreign secretary.³⁴ P.N. Haksar, himself a Kashmiri brahmin, called the MEA bureaucracy 'Brahmanical' in their mentality.³⁵ When Chokila Iyer became the foreign secretary in 2002, she was the first woman and the first SC/ST candidate to rise to the top position.

In a reflexive sociology of Indian diplomacy, Kira Huju presents an elaborate sketch of coded behaviours or social rules of belonging in the Indian diplomatic services. In declaiming a cosmopolitan bearing, the Indian elite aesthetic operates through what postcolonial theorists call 'hybridty' or sameness with difference: the imitation of Western manners with an assertion of upper caste ethic. Huju writes:

If it once was European powers who employed a colonial 'standard of civilization' to legitimate their dominance over those whose social practices they judged inferior, in a formally postcolonial order, Indian diplomats themselves have come to employ elite performances of cosmopolitanism as a kind of civilizational standard. This standard is continually enacted to secure one's status as a worthy participant of a white, historically upper-class, Westernized order in which some members are more equal than others. It is used domestically by the Service's elite against internal Others – lower-caste or lower-class diplomats, rural recruits, vernacular speakers – who are classified as insufficiently worldly.³⁶

In this environment, reservations can only be offered as charity: people from SC/ST communities were granted protections 'in view of their backwardness', an MEA circular noted.³⁷ In addition to the fact that 'backwardness' implicitly placed the blame for not 'civilizing' on the oppressed communities themselves, reservations were classified as special opportunities for those 'backwards' with

32 Tyabji 1988, 1992; Kaul 1982.

33 Kaul 1982, 84.

34 Rasgotra 2016. Also see Bhambri 1972, 189.

35 'Haksar to M.O. Mathai, 22 October 1955', PN Haksar Papers, Prime Minister's Memorial and Museum Library (PMML), New Delhi.

36 Huju 2023.

37 F. 16 (1) – FSP/47, MEA, f. 33, NAI.

some exceptional abilities to gain tutelage in the uber-civilized sphere of diplomacy.

But even 'charity' could only take a dalit officer so far. In several interviews with former diplomats, Kira Huju notes how the acclimatization of dalit diplomats to the social world of diplomacy was deemed an impossibility.³⁸ As Ladhu Chowdhary shows in his article, K.R. Narayanan, one of only two dalit candidates to break into the IFS (through a specially constituted Service Selection Board), was able to do so to a great degree because of his own social capital (foreign returned and recommendations from Harold Laski and Jawaharlal Nehru). Despite all the proof of excellence (he also topped his interview), G.S. Bajpai, the chairperson of the Committee and India's first Secretary General, could not contain himself from passing a cutting remark berating Narayanan for lack of intelligence.

The fact that an excellent candidate who was also dalit could be derided this way is an important context to remember while considering the MEA's response to the 1979 committee report. The MEA officials repeatedly stuck to the argument of merit; they argued that it was imperative that merit is not compromised at the altar of social justice. But as Ajantha Subrahmanian argues in her work titled *Caste of Merit*, it is no mere coincidence that institutions that self-identify as meritocratic – as the apogee of talent – continue to be overwhelmingly upper caste in character. In fact, their modernity is showcased in their self-acclaimed castelessness. (Assertion of caste identity is only identified with the subaltern castes.) Here, merit is about embracing the language and ethic of universal modernity, while caste connotes a desire for unearned privilege. This understanding of caste and merit is thoroughly ignorant – perhaps deliberately so – of how merit is itself a product of historic privilege and an amassment of precious social capital rather than any innate ability.³⁹ Such convenient narratives of merit as innate superiority are replete in disciplines such as IR; as Sankaran Krishna has argued, the inequalities and hierarchies of the international system are justified through recourse to merit as an organizing principle, while transcoding or invisibilizing race and caste.⁴⁰ The modern exam, as an all-encompassing metric of merit, Subrahmanian argues, helps in production of casteless moderns.⁴¹

Kamna Tiwari and Rama Devi's article in this special issue discusses the representation question in the MEA in the contemporary period. They show the

38 Huju 2023.

39 Subrahmanian 2019.

40 Krishna 2023.

41 Subrahmanian 2019, 20.

skewed patterns of caste representation. Added to this is the complication that while the percentage of ambassadors from deprived communities has certainly increased, more strategically important ambassadorial positions are dominated by upper-caste individuals. Our own analysis of Indian ambassadors to four important countries – the United States, China, Pakistan and Russia – shows that between 1947 and 2022, 102 out of 127 were upper caste.⁴² These findings are painful and infuriating but hardly shocking.⁴³

This is equally true of the Indian academic/policy advocacy community. If the practitioners of diplomacy and foreign policy come from privileged backgrounds, the spaces for the producers of knowledge are equally skewed in their upper-caste dominance. Indeed, why caste has not been thought of as a subject appropriate for research and writing on IR and diplomacy becomes quite evident through a forensic scanning of who defines and occupies the subject of Indian IR and diplomacy.

In June 2023, the oldest and largest IR school in the country, the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University had 43 professors; only three of them were from SC backgrounds and not a single professor was from ST or OBC categories.⁴⁴ This is despite the fact that, as was mentioned earlier, there is a constitutional quota of 27 per cent for OBCs, 15 per cent for SCs and 7.5 per cent for STs. Across major Indian universities such as Jadavpur University, Delhi University, Banaras Hindu University and Pondicherry University, caste-based gaps increase with seniority. Of the 28 professors we identified as IR-affiliated, a total of 14.3 per cent were from the three reserved categories (SCs, STs and OBCs).⁴⁵ While representation improves slightly at associate and

42 Even current postings show the same pattern. Among eighteen G20 country ambassadors, twelve are known to be from the unreserved or UR category and the backgrounds of the others are unclear. This is based on the data collected from the website from Indian missions in these states, available at <https://www.india.gov.in/list-diplomatic-missions-india> (date of access: 20 April 2024).

43 The figures we present here for the MEA and the academic and policy scholarship are based on yet-unpublished findings. We collected data on caste-based representation in Indian universities, IR think tanks and the IFS using Right to Information (RTI) and publicly available records. The authors made every effort to verify the social backgrounds of the individuals in question. However, some discrepancies in identifying social status may exist due to either a lack of responses to certain RTI applications or inconsistent/misleading information available on some official platforms.

44 Jawaharlal Nehru University. 'Faculty List as on 01.06.2023'. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University (June 2023), <https://www.jnu.ac.in/sites/default/files/Faculty%20List%20as%20on%2001.06.2023.pdf>.

45 A total of 85.7 per cent were UR (unreserved), 7.1 per cent SC, 3.6 per cent ST and 3.6 per cent OBC. Nearly all the UR posts are filled by candidates from 'higher' or 'upper castes'.

assistant professor levels, caste privileged faculty still dominates, making up to 73 per cent and 50.57 per cent of these levels, respectively.⁴⁶ It is quite normal in Indian universities to readvertise, and sometime even collapse, a 'reserved seat' under the pretext of merit, with a mere disclaimer of 'No suitable candidate found'. Beyond just numbers, however, this systemic exclusion affects who gets research opportunities, leadership roles,⁴⁷ journal editorial opportunities and even access to facilities such as housing and funding. Accordingly, junior faculty members, mainly assistant professors from marginalized backgrounds, often face high teaching loads and little support.

Similar lack of caste diversity afflicts Indian IR think tanks. Publicly funded think tanks such as the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) and Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) are opaque about their reservation policies.⁴⁸ However, from their websites it is evident that nearly 80 per cent of ICWA's presidents and most of MP-IDSA's directors-general are from upper-caste backgrounds. Private think tanks show the same trend. In many ways these spaces are even more upper-caste dominated because they are not required to follow reservation requirements.⁴⁹ Likewise, the editorial boards of five major IR journals in India – *International Studies*, *India Quarterly*, *Strategic Analysis*, *Maritime Affairs* and *China Report* –

Thus, UR becomes synonymous with higher caste, which is not its legal meaning, as it is supposed to be open to every candidate. 'BHU Teachers Seek Clarity on 203 Posts Missing for OBCs, 340 Extra Appointments in General Category'. News18, 28 June 2024. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/bhu-teachers-seek-clarity-on-203-posts-missing-for-obcs-340-extra-appointments-in-general-category-2924311.html>; '3,669 Reserved Teaching Posts Vacant in Central Universities: Govt in Rajya Sabha'. Indian Express, 21 July 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/3669-reserved-teaching-posts-vacant-in-central-universities-govt-in-rajya-sabha/>.

46 These numbers are based on collection of data through RTIs filed by Pavan Kumar.

47 Out of the eight leading IR faculties, six were led by caste-privileged group members, one by SC and one OBC. At SIS JNU, all the thirteen Chairs of various Centres were UR individuals.

48 In response to our Right to Information query, the ICWA stated that it does not collect or maintain data on researchers based on social categories. The ICWA, despite being funded by the MEA, has not advertised for reserved posts in the past. The MP-IDSA, which is funded by the Defence Ministry, refused to share data about their previous recruitments, but claims to follow the government's reservation policies. 'Fellowship Rules (As amended in 2011)'. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2011, accessed 9 May 2025, https://www.idsa.in/system/files/page/2015/fellowship-rules-amended_2011_compressed_o.pdf; and 'ICWA Rules and Regulations'. Indian Council of World Affairs, 2025, https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=3177&lid=2440.

49 At the Carnegie Endowment, for instance, fourteen of sixteen scholars are UR. Their website was accessed on 20 April 2024.

are majorly composed of upper-caste scholars.⁵⁰ Hence, knowledge production about IR and diplomacy is dominated by caste elites.⁵¹

4 The Figurative Brahmin

In *Arthasashtra*, a text that has in recent years become a reference guide for Indian IR scholars and practitioners, its author – assumed to be Kautilya – argues that only a brahmin could be a diplomat.⁵² Historically, it was the brahmin, after all, who had to provide the consensual apparatus for statecraft. The kshatriya was the enforcer; the brahmin the provider of law. Colloquially, diplomacy is an art of generating consensus. A counsellor and a diplomat, for Kautilya, require the same qualities that are inherited in a brahmin.⁵³ Professionally, it requires tact and skill with deployment of knowledge, language and articulation in a way that, at least scripturally, only a brahmin could do. Diplomacy married state power with cultural capital and consequently provided an ideal platform for a group that coveted both.

In 1927, when V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, India's first diplomat, sat down to write instructions for selecting his potential successor, he identified the ability to travel in higher diplomatic circles with ease as a chief requirement. This was a world in which a nation's ability to meet the 'standards of civilization' determined the status of its 'diplomats'. India was attempting to cross the racial barrier through a civilizational argument. For Sastri, then, an Indian diplomat ought to be one who could gain ready acceptance into white circles, and one could do it by being the best representation of the country's (Hindu) civilization and its philosophy through purity in public conduct and articulation. In other words, a brahmin-like figure. In his own diplomatic travels, he was often identified as a brahmin, one who was far from the archetype Indian 'coolie'.⁵⁴ Thus, his own

50 The details of the editors and editorial board are available on their websites, which are in the public domain: India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs, 'Editorial Board', SAGE Journals, <https://journals.sagepub.com/editorial-board/iqq>. Strategic Analysis, 'Editorial Board', Taylor & Francis Online, <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rsan20/about-this-journal#editorial-board>, accessed 9 May 2025. China Report, 'Editorial Board', SAGE Journals, <https://journals.sagepub.com/editorial-board/chr>, accessed 9 May 2025. International Studies, 'Editorial Board', SAGE Journals, <https://journals.sagepub.com/editorial-board/isq>, accessed 9 May 2025.

51 For a general critique of Indian social sciences, see Guru 2002, Sukumar 2022.

52 Kautilya 2000 (e-book): 75.

53 In contrast, a brahmin is ineligible for the military, because an enemy may win over brahmins by just prostrating before him.

54 Sastri had suggested his fellow brahmin R.P. Paranjpe's name but to his consternation,

access to the high table of international diplomacy was enabled by his identification as a brahmin, both literally and figuratively. The figurative and literal may not be always co-terminus, but they often are. The reason is because caste capital often transforms into more secularized and modern forms of social and cultural capital.⁵⁵

Gajendran Ayyathurai's and Sruthi Muraleedharan's contributions in this special issue portend towards the figurative brahmin as a representative of India. In the diplomatic gifting practices, Murleedharan asks why Gandhi is a representative of India, and not Ambedkar. In a similar vein, Ayyathurai elaborates on a cast(e) of characters – Vivekananda, Tagore, Sastri, Nehru and Radhakrishnan – and asks quite the same question.⁵⁶ These figures claim to represent a very specific idea of India to the world outside: the idea of a spiritual and peace-loving India. This self-narrative of peace, of India as a non-violent power, a civilizational state, are an enduring theme in the narrative of nationalist historiography and are accordingly in Indian declamations of its foreign policy, despite the Hindutva turn in current years.⁵⁷

While several postcolonial scholars are aware of the constructed nature of self-celebratory claims, others tend to obfuscate. So, for instance, Deep Datta-Ray argues in his *The Making of Indian Diplomacy* that Indian practices of diplomacy are impossible to be analyzed from 'outside' because their immersion in Indian religious texts (*Mahabharata*) makes them both exceptional and unapproachable for non-indigenes.⁵⁸ Aside from the fact that his main empirical proof in support of his argument is his 'immersive' finding that Indian diplomats are taught *Mahabharata* (in English, we presume!), there is an assumption here that Datta-Ray, and authors of several recent books,⁵⁹ maintain that the

the British India government chose K.V. Reddy, a non-brahmin leader from Madras from Justice party. See Thakur 2021, 210–212. On the treatment of the pejoratively named 'coolies' in Indian diplomacy, see Natarajan 2023.

55 Deshpande 2013.

56 See Thakur 2018, Chacko 2012.

57 Vivekananda's claim that 'the teaching of the Shastras was to be the eternal foreign policy of India' is perhaps too rhetorical, but considering that the dominant foreign policy narrative of India has been its self-fashioning as a tolerant and peaceful country (one that even called its nuclear tests 'Peaceful Nuclear Test' and 'Smiling Buddha', respectively). The other prevailing narrative is of postcolonial, racialized injury (keeping to the nuclear theme, nuclear apartheid). All the above representatives share these two features in common: they represent the spiritualism of India and its opposition to the West. The two, often related, themes of exceptionalism and injury have been discussed by scholars of Indian foreign policy and diplomacy at length.

58 Datta-Ray 2015.

59 Jaishankar 2020, Jaishankar 2024, Narlikar, Mattoo and Narlikar 2024.

main tenets of Indian diplomacy and foreign policy are derived from certain Hindu religious texts. Relatedly, what is now called to be 'Indian IR' is a tradition that draws on specific texts, such as *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagwat Gita*, *Dharmasastras* (such as *Manusmriti*) and philosophical traditions such as *Vedanta*.⁶⁰

In his rigorous expose of the brahmanical nature of Indian nationalist narrative, Braj Ranjan Mani notes the uncanny similarities in the basic formulations of Indian nationalist historiography and the colonial imagination of India.⁶¹ The idea of a spiritual India is in fact a very modern one; it draws on Indological and orientalist scholarship from the late 18th century and its popularization by neo-vedantic revivalism. *Vedanta* is a specific school of Hindu thought and philosophy that discards the duality of body and soul/mind, treats the physical world (body) as an illusion and argues that only brahma (soul) is real. Mani writes: 'The Oriental scholarship which produced the images of Aryan glory, Vedic purity and Muslim tyranny was in fact a joint and mutually beneficial project of the foreign and indigenous elites'.⁶²

The co-production of this idea of 'spiritual' India came with a simultaneous flattening of discursive plurality in India, a point that Chacko and Thakur also make in their intervention. Several other philosophies, such as those of *shramanic* religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism as well as other heterodox, materialist and rationalist traditions, such as *lokāyata*, Ajivikas and bhakti, are excluded from the upper-caste nationalist narrative. Indeed, these were popular among the lowered sections of society and reflected the ubiquitous revolt of the masses against *vedic brahmanism*.⁶³ Vedic brahmanism, of which vedanta – literally, at the end of the vedic age – was a key part, advocated a form of spiritualism that outwardly may seem pacifist but was eminently violent towards the shudras and dalits (*shudraatishudras*, to use Jotiba Phule's term). The avowed spiritualism of vedic brahmanism and its self-celebratory enunciations of non-violence masked centuries of violence – both structural and manifest – on the shudratishudras. Indeed, each of the Hindu texts, celebrated by upper castes, are notorious for their violence towards shudratishudras.⁶⁴

60 For recent e-IR articles curated by Deepshikha Shahi and Raghav Dua, see 'Indian IR Meets Global IR', E-International Relations, 17 August 2023, <https://www.e-ir.info/tag/indian-ir-meets-global-ir/>.

61 Mani 2005, 50.

62 Mani 2005, 198.

63 Omvedt 2008, Chattopadhyaya 1959.

64 Ambedkar 2016, Phule 1991, Mani 2005.

This has two important takeaways for our discussion concerning Indian diplomacy and foreign policy. Firstly, Indian (i.e., Hindu) conceptions of non-violence tend to emphasize the moral superiority of non-violence as a transformative practice. In Gandhian terms, non-violence is important in its own terms: because it is the basis of a superior order. A Hindu view of world order repudiates war as a form of moral decay (as Indian nationalists such as Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose and Mohandas Gandhi did), because, among other things, war is crass materialism.⁶⁵ War disregards the innate superiority of the brahmin's path towards spiritualism; it is a violent experience that places the body, literally, in the line of fire, where the preservation of the body takes precedence over the question of soul. But, in more worldly considerations, war is seen as a direct threat to the defenceless brahmin, an assertion of anarchy.⁶⁶ (It is difficult, after all, to defeat an incoming bullet with a battery of chants.)

An anti-caste perspective challenges this assertion about the morality of non-violence. As Foucault argues, peace is often the continuation of war by other means.⁶⁷ Hindu society, a seemingly peaceful society, is a reproduction of everyday sedimented violence. A key point here is, as Ambedkar was often to remind, despite its declamations of morality, brahmanical non-violence was not founded on any basis of equality. In fact, there is no conception of associated life (of equality and fraternity) in brahmanism.⁶⁸ Order is maintained through an ontological reproduction of inequality and internal violence.

Indeed, materialism as a philosophy allows for a possibility of equality through redistribution of resources, whether through war or peaceful means. So, Ambedkar chose a material rationalist concept of non-violence rather than a moral one. His responses to India's foreign policy conundrums are advocative of a rationalist basis of non-violence. Often exasperated with the excessively moralistic tones of Nehru's foreign policy, Ambedkar offered solutions that were 'more honorable, transactive and historically practicable'.⁶⁹

Secondly, the Hindutva turn in India has divided commentators on how to see this transformation. Some have insisted on the continuities between Modi and his predecessors' foreign policies, while others argue that Modi's foreign policy is more assertive, 'realist' and *sui generis*.⁷⁰ What no one disputes,

65 See Thakur 2018.

66 Thakur 2024.

67 Foucault 2003, 47.

68 For Ambedkar, equality and fraternity were both key ingredients of a democratic order, which vedic brahminism lacked. See Ambedkar 2016, 177.

69 Thakur 2018, 44, Yengde 2018.

70 See for instance, Mohan 2015, Miller and Sullivan de Estrada 2017, Hall 2019, Ganguly 2017, Gupta et al. 2019.

however, is that the sources of his foreign policy remain nearly the same as his predecessors (if at all the trenchant anti-Westernism of Nehruvian years is perhaps notched up several scales). Hindu nationalists have popularized and weaponized the language of postcolonial rhetoric against dalits and religious minorities.⁷¹ Scholars and commentators of Indian IR, foreign policy and diplomacy must thus consider what anti-caste scholarship has always maintained: Hindutva is not a reaction to Indian secularism, but its continuation.⁷² In his contribution, Sankaran Krishna considers how, to quote Meera Nanda, ‘Hindutva ... is not a reaction to the excesses of Western-style secularism, but a beneficiary of the neo-Hindu indigenization of the concept of secularism as tolerance of all orthodoxies’.⁷³ Hinduism had ‘thrived as the de-facto religion of the Indian state, with relatively less or more openness’ since independence.⁷⁴ Furthermore, as Chacko and Thakur elaborate, ideas of ‘integrated Humanism’ and *vasudhev kutumbakam* seemingly promote a notion of the oneness of the world,⁷⁵ celebrating unity, a desirable ideal in the face of global problems such as climate change. But these ideas come very much from the wellspring of vedanta philosophy and seek to flatten diversity, eradicating all the ‘others’ and unifying the world in the figure of the *brahma(n)*.⁷⁶ To return to our original idea, the figurative and the literal become one, the violence is sublated in the achievement of spiritual unity/perfection. Such oneness is also predicated on the international recognition of India’s rightful civilizational, brahmanical status as *Vishwaguru* – spiritual leader and teacher to the world, or global brahmin.⁷⁷

5 The Global Reproduction of Caste

5.1 *Caste and International Orders*

In ‘Modern India’, an essay written in 1899, the Indian spiritualist traveller Vivekananda analogized the historical trajectory of the evolution of the international system through the fourfold varna system of Hinduism. His argument

71 Rationalist critiques of postcolonialism had always warned that this was the natural next step of indigenism.

72 Teltumbe 2018.

73 Nanda 2007, 3.

74 Nanda 2007, 2.

75 Oneness in fact pervades Modi’s politics in everything: one leader, one nation, one language, one world.

76 Watanabe 2023.

77 On the pedagogic imperatives of Vishwaguru discourse, see Sullivan de Estrada 2023, 440.

was that in early human history, most societies were ruled by their priestly class (the brahmins) who dominated by their inherent virtues of intellect and sanctity of character. Over time, the abstract (and secretive and discriminatory) nature of this priestly power led to the assertion of material power as the dominant characteristic of rulers. Hence, replacing the brahmins, great empires were founded by kshatriyas by the use of coercive force. But they too were, at the end of the medieval period, usurped by the entrepreneurial merchant classes as profit became the currency of power. The European empires of modern age were vaishya-driven which led to the great flowering of trade and culture. However, the end of this vaishya-age, as Vivekananda called the 19th century, was stalked by the fear of the rise of the shudra-class, represented by socialists, anarchists and nihilists.

Vivekananda distinguished between the shudras who became 'great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaishya or the Kshatriya' (such as the Japanese) or 'fell-down to shudrahood' like the Chinese or Turkish, and the shudras who practiced shudrahood and 'as a rule, are either meanly servile, licking dog-like the feet of the higher class, or otherwise are as inhuman as brute beasts'.⁷⁸ Fearing the rise of this shudra-hood, he wrote:

a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra class, with their Shudra-hood; that is to say, not like that as at present when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaishya or the Kshatriya, but a time will come when the Shudras of every country, with their inborn Shudra nature and habits – not becoming in essence Vaishya or Kshatriya, but remaining as Shudras – will gain absolute supremacy in every society.⁷⁹

Vivekananda's analysis of the historical evolution of world politics was tied to how he thought Indians were themselves being turned into slavish 'shudras' by the British. He instead sought a reclamation of India's brahmanical heritage as the greatest contribution India could make to world politics. 'Our eternal foreign policy must be the preaching of the Shastras to the nations of the world', he once argued.⁸⁰

If Vivekananda sought to 'Make India Brahman Again' (to channel a Trumpian phrase), the academic Anirudh Gupta proposed that India consider its role as a brahman in the South Asian regional system. In an article in 1990, he argued

⁷⁸ Vivekananda 1989.

⁷⁹ Vivekananda 1989.

⁸⁰ Vivekananda 1994, 183.

that India ought to view the South Asian regional system not through the lens of power domination or moral superiority, but rather through a caste prism.⁸¹ India was the 'brahman' in the region, so smaller states like Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives would be 'dependent castes' because of the strategic and economic linkages with India. They are the shudras, who India needed to provide for and occasionally deal with sternly if they defied the brahman. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were 'intermediary castes' who could enjoy a relatively large degree of political autonomy, except if things turned awry and India needed to intervene.⁸² Pakistan was the outcaste, 'the unremediable, untouchable – the *Asura* – whom the ancient Aryans conquered and kept outside the fold of caste in order to perpetuate the brahman's supremacy as the twice-born'. In other words, Pakistan ought to be completely segregated in the region.⁸³

The above are two instances of how casteist framings are utilized to understand international pecking orders. In a similar fashion, Indian theorizations of non-alignment as a foreign policy practice have been understood through a caste lens.⁸⁴ Crucially, in these readings, caste relations are offered as an alternative model of relations of power which are even suited to understanding and implementing international and regional orders. Caste masquerades as a form of power analytic serving to open up traditional ways in which international hierarchical orders are considered.

5.2 *Competitive Framings*

In an *Atlantic Monthly* piece in 1860, the polymath Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr wrote about 'The Brahmin Caste of New England'. He referred to the aristocracy in the 'New World' which, he maintained, was distinct from the feudal aristocracy of the Old World. The Old World aristocracy grew out of the military systems of the Middle Ages; the New World brahmins grew mainly from the great commerce houses and were distinguished by their intellectual superiority.⁸⁵ He placed great emphasis on hereditary nature of this new aristocracy, for the refinement and intellectual sophistication are passed down through hereditary training. Nature's innate republicanism made that occasional infringement possible; that is, in rare occurrences someone may outgrow the bounds of one's family and acquire intellectual merit. Uprooted from its Indian context, Holmes' usage of the term brahmin retained the emphasis on intellectual

81 Gupta 1990.

82 Such as the invention through the Indian Peace Keeping Force in the late 1980s.

83 Gupta 1990, 712.

84 See Thakur 2024.

85 Holmes Sr 1860, 91–93.

superiority and heredity but erased all associated notions of purity/pollution, privilege/oppression, honour/denigration and plenty/want.⁸⁶ Instead, he was emphatic that this new aristocracy, or 'Boston Brahmins' a term he then popularized, were 'harmless, inoffensive, untitled'. In its North American migration, the meanings of brahmin were morphed and in its common usage around the globe, the term has come to mean something akin to Holmes' usage. In American diplomacy, the 'Brahmin as Diplomat' has come to mean an individual of intellectual repute and liberal disposition who is overqualified even for a diplomatic position; their personal repute in other fields being greater than what diplomacy could afford them.⁸⁷ Popular discourse too refers to the expertise of IR 'pundits' in policy circles and beyond.

The brahmin is therefore globally reproduced in an insipid form without the innate offense of its caste supremacism. Medha and Kalathmika Natarajan interrogate the other of the brahmin by tracing the global circulation and usage of the highly derogatory caste slur 'pariah'. References to the 'pariah state' and 'pariah diplomacy' abound in the language of IR and Indian diplomacy, but with little to no recognition of the violent caste origins and meanings of the term. Going beyond seeing this solely as an out of place, ignorant usage of a casteist term, they examine references to the 'pariah' as an invocation of caste to both cement the hierarchies of the international order and reify caste. What this placing of 'brahmin' and 'pariah', side by side, as globalized caste vocabularies, also shows is that their reproduction always carries their casteist meanings. On the one hand, the brahmin is seen as a figure of repute, on the other, the 'pariah' is identified as a figure of abjection. Such a reading demonstrates that caste is far from a 'domestic', 'internal' category suited largely for the study of India or South Asia but instead shapes foundational analytical categories in IR and diplomacy.

While caste-related terms have travelled seamlessly in the world of diplomacy, an enduring debate has been about the association of caste with race globally.⁸⁸ Suraj Yengde's work shows a thick engagement with the question of race-as-caste question in the United States.⁸⁹ A comparison with an odious discriminatory system existing for centuries in the degenerating East, helped to amplify the ills of racism – not that they needed any amplifying for anyone with eyes to see – in the 'progressive' West. Indeed, Isabel Wilkerson, in a best-seller that was widely debated, made a case for seeing racism as fundamentally

86 Berreman 1971.

87 Kaplan 1973, 28.

88 Wilkerson 2020.

89 Yengde 2023, Yengde 2024.

a form of caste oppression. For her, caste provides an overarching framework to understand various discriminatory systems from the United States to Nazi Germany.⁹⁰ In contrast, Indian nationalist leaders like Lajpat Rai offered their solidarities to African Americans by diminishing the sufferings of Indian dalits.⁹¹ In response, Ambedkar wrote a tract arguing that untouchability is worse than slavery.

This competitive framing of the two concepts is, however, also punctured by a rich tradition of 'sibling solidarity' between black struggles in America and Africa and anti-caste resistance of dalits. Jotiba Phule famously dedicated his *Ghulamgiri* (Slavery) to 'the good people of America' in celebration of emancipation and compared the cruelties of European settlers on American Indians to the racial subjugation of the aborigines by the Aryans. In 1972, when Dalit panthers defined 'dalit(s)' as 'members of scheduled caste and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion', they drew on an expansive conception of blackness employed by Black Panthers in America and Black Consciousness in South Africa.⁹² There is, hence, a rich tapestry of grassroots internationalism – a development of convivial relations outside of the official incantations of diplomacy – whose utopian visions are steeped in the traditions of *Begumpura*.

6 Towards Begumpura

As Gail Omvedt tells us, despite common perceptions of utopias being universalistic, they are peculiarly provincial. Thomas Moore's 'utopia', perhaps the most famous iteration of the idea, Omvedt reminds us, may have been conceptualized as an ideal society of 'Christian communism' but it was clear about its placement in historical time; it was achieved only after 'the advent of a more imperialistic and violent Europe'.⁹³ Likewise, in Indian conceptions, Omvedt argues if *Ram Rajya* (the idealized polity of Ram) – a perfect caste order – is the utopia of brahmanism, then Begumpura – the ideal city of Bhakti saint Ramdas (or Bali Rajya of Phule, Dravidastan of Periyar, the Buddhist Commonwealth of Sakya Buddhists) – is the alternative utopia based on anti-caste solidarity.

90 Wilkerson 2020.

91 Yengde 2023, 25.

92 Biko 1987.

93 Omvedt 2008, 12.

Begumpura as utopia then provides a space for an alternative tradition of 'anti-diplomacy'. Anti-diplomacy is used to connote a vision of diplomacy beyond the states.⁹⁴ If diplomacy is a meditation between states, which in effect disregards the possibilities of any cosmopolitan visions, anti-diplomacy is, in contrast, 'a propaganda among peoples' whose purpose is to 'transcend all estranged relations'.⁹⁵ In his contribution, Narendra Kumar goes further and presents a case for considering Kanshi Ram as a 'counter-diplomat', who repurposes diplomacy as a strategic act of resistance and solidarity building. Kumar highlights how Kanshi Ram, as a representative of the bahujans (the majority), de-sacralizes diplomacy. Diplomacy as a state practice, one which is perhaps most assiduously identified with the vision of its elites, is exclusionary of the bahujan. As we identified in the case of Indian diplomacy above, it is brahmanical – in both literal and figurative ways. What space do the subaltern dalit bahujans have to articulate their visions and practice their international politics? The brahmanical system casts them in the form of an adjectivized presence. K.R. Narayan as the perpetual outsider-insider, is often a dalit candidate, a dalit ambassador, a dalit President. But as Ladhu Chowdhry shows, Narayanan's resistance to this adjectivism is fierce. His opposition is not a repudiation of dalit identity, rather it is an effort to claim it on its own terms. In a different setting, Kanshi Ram's advocacy through international public platforms, or what is often also now termed as public diplomacy, draws on surfeit of anti/counter-diplomatic possibilities of public action.

This special issue is an invitation to re-think diplomacy, indeed, to de-sacralize it. It is an opening gambit in a series of investigations to problematize the ways in which diplomacy as a site has remained an exclusively upper caste (male) space. In our own effort here, we do not adequately interrogate the intersections of caste and gender in diplomacy. This is certainly our failing, and one that demands more concerted effort on our part, as well on our readers, to research and reveal the gendered framings of caste-informed narratives,⁹⁶ as well as the casteist framings of gender-informed narratives in diplomacy and IR.⁹⁷ We invite our readers to think productively about turning diplomacy – both its knowledge and practice – into an inclusive site. Here, Ankit Kawade's

94 der Derian 1987.

95 But anti-diplomacy has been used in multiple ways: frank talk, imperialism, revolutionary (connotes both utopian and dystopian) potential; both violent and virtuous; autarchy as antidiplomacy; imperialism as anti-diplomacy; irrational diplomacy. See Cornago 2013.

96 For an excellent intervention on this, see Rao 2016.

97 See Thapar-Bjorkert and Parashar 2025. For a counter view, see Global Voices South Asia 2025.

conceptual bridge-building, through the figure of Ambedkar, between a diplomat in the broadest possible sense ('an anti-thesis of a refugee') and a narrow sense ('a messenger of glad tidings') alerts us to the many meanings of diplomacy.

Hopefully, through this endeavour, interested students of diplomacy will also have more than enough answers to the question we asked upfront: What does caste have to do with diplomacy?

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