



Editorial

The effective functioning of systems, whether providing healthcare, public services, or transport connectivity, rests on both demand- and supply-side factors. Even if we do not see everything from a narrow economic perspective, the mismatch between providers and users of services can have drastic consequences for societies. The past few months have seen conflicts deepen across the world. While the bigger conflicts get the world's attention, the smaller, but never inconsequential by any means, sometimes get overlooked. The exasperation of an income-poor person in not being able to meet a doctor in a public facility, the inordinate delays in opening crucial transnational roadway corridors, and lack of modernisation in public governance have become part of daily lives in the developing world for so long that they are hardly recognised as dysfunctional.

The inefficiencies and ineffectiveness have become normalised in the developing world. However, it is prudent that social scientists must never look away. A critical evaluation of the social processes would jolt people and policymakers to life and offer profound explanations to responses that may seem spontaneous. Examples of such enlightening analysis are many. Scholars have linked the global surge in hate speech and xenophobia with the debilitating effects of neoliberal policies. The crisis of unemployment and small businesses has led to social upheaval in many places. Even when the analyses are not relational in this manner, an in-depth view of problems and issues at hand provide crucial insights into redesigning policies, institutions, and systems. This is the common thread running across the contributions in this issue of *Artha Journal of Social Sciences*.

We present three articles, a commentary, and a book review in this issue. Although this is not a thematic issue, the articles examine important problems in different realms: the low utilisation of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Homoeopathy, and Sowa-Rigpa) systems of medicine in the national capital region of India, the slow pace of two critical infrastructure projects taken up by the Indian government in Myanmar and their future, and the partial digitalisation efforts in the public sector of Southern African countries. The aspect of incompleteness that runs through the three topics is relevant for further examination. The commentary examines the ways of measuring women's agency in survey data and questions the current practice. Finally, the book review introduces a Kannada-language book on caste politics to the readers that uses an unconventional approach to such an exercise. We offer summaries of the contributions below.

AYUSH has seen a greater institutional commitment in recent years. Although the scientific view on alternative medicine, comprising a vast array of methods, is somewhat sceptical, the state and global actors have not shied away from offering patronage to such systems. But has this resulted in increased utilisation of AYUSH systems by people? Pratibha Sharma and Megha Jacob explore this question using a systematic review of the literature in their article “Evaluating AYUSH Integration in Delhi NCR: A PRISMA-Framework Study.” They bring out a “policy-perception paradox” in relation to AYUSH. The number of hospitals and speciality centres in AYUSH is considerably large in Delhi (National Capital Region), India. But the share of out-patient visits is negligible compared to the utilisation of urban public health centres, which offer modern medicine. Chronic patients and those who fear “side effects” of modern medicine are attracted to AYUSH, but there exists some scepticism and lack of awareness even within them. Along with these demand-side issues are the problems of vacant positions in AYUSH hospitals and the absence of publicly funded insurance coverage. The authors conclude that the mainstreaming of AYUSH systems requires more than just enhanced infrastructure expenditure.

Shonyothem Ng explores the current state of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMT-TH) and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), two big infrastructure projects that are pivotal to India’s “Act East” policy “Connectivity as Strategy: Assessing India’s Key Infrastructure Initiatives in Myanmar and Thailand”. While these projects have their official beginnings in the first decade of the 21st century, they are yet to be completed. These projects connect Myanmar with the Northeast region of India, two areas in the region beset with insufficient infrastructure. The completion of the projects depends crucially on the political system of Myanmar, which has been especially turbulent in the past few years. Drawing on secondary sources, the author presents a detailed view of the elections that happened at the end of 2025 and their implications for the projects. The conflict between different armed ethnic groups and the government is ongoing, and the compromised democratic process further worsens the overall situation for the infrastructure projects.

Digitalisation efforts in underserved Southern Africa are examined by Christopher Dick-Sagoe and Daniel Odoom in their article “Contextual Drawbacks to Implementing Digital Systems in Selected Countries in the Southern African Public Sector: An Integrative Review.” While digitalisation per se is not unfamiliar to the people of Africa, its adoption in the public sector is wanting and needs to be studied in the Southern African region. Using an integrative review approach, the authors synthesise the findings from the existing literature, which points to technological, organisational, and environmental factors as challenges to the adoption of digital systems in Southern Africa. Failures in coordination between public departments,

cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, lack of interest, and technical issues with hardware have hampered the growth of information and communication technologies. This has happened in the context of a serious digital divide. The way forward would involve the removal of these “mutually reinforcing constraints.”

In their commentary titled “The Need to Relook at the Measure of Women’s Agency,” Subhasree Ghatak and Meghna Dutta examine the issues with the widespread indicators used for measuring women’s agency. The survey-based measures use a host of variables related to freedom of movement, decisions on healthcare and financial needs, and so on. While these are important, they do not probe deeper into whether the responses have been conditioned by the circumstances that women live in. They are also cross-sectional and woefully fall short of capturing agency over time. The authors argue for moving beyond a “checklist-based approach” to measuring women’s agency, given the complex and diverse contexts of women’s lives.

Finally, the book review “Caste Politics: Sociological Analysis of Language, Literature, and Cultural Industry”, by Shashank S. R. brings out a sociological analysis of caste in Karnataka. The book under review has a different way to unravel caste dynamics in society: through biographical sketches of important persons and how their lives relate to caste politics. The analysis of a popular television show by the book and its guests provides evidence for the inherent bias that creeps into people. The fact that such patterns are repeated, with individuals representing castes and their overall relationships, shows that such biases are not innocent and reflective of a deeper structural issue. While the reviewer brings out a few flaws in the book, it is adjudged to be a unique contribution that would further our understanding of caste.

We are extremely thankful to all the authors and reviewers for their contributions to this issue. We appreciate the time and effort they put into bringing our journal to publication. We would like to thank our editorial assistant, Nikita Biswal, for her help with the journal’s administrative work and correspondence. We thank Dr Malavika Menon, Coordinator, and Jerry Mathew, Administrative Assistant, from the Centre for Publications at CHRIST (Deemed to be University), for their immense help and guidance in the process. We are grateful to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for extending their support to the publication. Lastly, we are always indebted to the management and the officials at CHRIST for their continued support.

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