

Editorial

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The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) was founded in 1948 as a global trade organisation with the objective to give a fair chance in trading prospects and international exchange to all member nations. GATT made way for the setting up of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 with an initial membership of 123 nations. The WTO lay down general rules pertaining to bilateral and multilateral trade in goods and services between members. The basic premise was that by eliminating all barriers (tariff and non-tariff) to trade, utilisation of world resources could be maximised while also protecting the environment. The intention was to provide greater market access to all member countries while safeguarding the interests of developing countries. Though trade in commodities and services was promoted, international mobility of labour was left completely outside the ambit of WTO. There was no general rule about where, how and if labour could migrate. Each country was allowed to have its own rules for immigration and emigration; no need for uniformity was felt here.

WTO has been working well for the last three decades, seen as the golden period of globalisation and growth. However, major economic and financial occurrences in big international economies like the USA overflowed into the rest of the world, greatly impacting the economies of all their trading partners. India has managed to limit the adverse impacts of such major international down-cycles mostly because of the large size of its domestic market and small size of its exports as a proportion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The latest international shock that the world was subjected to was when the United States, under President Donald Trump, announced unilateral tariff action effecting new, high tariff rates impacting nearly 90 countries, starting April 2025. The White House imposed 'Reciprocal Tariffs' on 60 countries that it designated as the 'worst offenders' in the sense that they were having high tariffs and non-tariff barriers like currency manipulation, subsidies, theft of intellectual property and dumping. The USA used the International

Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose reciprocal tariffs. This was said to have been aimed at promoting domestic manufacturing, to protect national security, and to substitute for Federal Income Taxes. Though the tariffs announced initially were very high, after a few rounds of negotiations separately with different countries, the levels were lowered.

Taxes on India were levied at the rate of 50%. However, the pharmaceutical industry, semiconductors, energy resources like crude oil and natural gas and critical minerals were exempted to safeguard US supply chains. The generic drugs sold by India, which constitute 50% of the US market, therefore escaped this tariff. The industries that were affected are gems and jewellery, leather and footwear, marine products, chemicals and auto components. The overall decline in GDP was expected to be around 0.2% to 0.5%, that is, a decline from an estimated 6.5% to 6%. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the textile and leather industry have become less competitive against rivals Bangladesh and Vietnam. The high tariffs also resulted in volatility in the stock market in general, except in the pharmaceutical and IT sectors.

The objective of the 'Make in India' initiative launched by the Government of India in September 2014 was to make India a global manufacturing hub by attracting investment, boosting skill development, fostering innovation, building world-class infrastructure and increasing the share of manufacturing in GDP. Jobs were to be created through supportive policies and infrastructure development programmes like 'Startup India' and 'Skill India', making India self-reliant and enhancing its economic growth. An attempt was made to attract domestic and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), support design, research and Intellectual Property Rights, develop a skilled workforce in accordance with industry needs, develop industrial corridors and smart cities, and upgrade existing infrastructure to facilitate a conducive environment for ease of doing business. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was expected to incentivise manufacturing in key sectors in the country, like the automotive and electronics sectors, to make India a competitive global player in manufacturing and boost our exports.

When the world was going through the COVID-19 pandemic, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, announced the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' on May 12, 2020. The objective of this campaign was to help India recover from the economic shock imposed by the pandemic by adopting the technique of 'self-reliance'. The idea was to rely on India's internal capabilities and resources to promote employment and bring about economic development by encouraging local industries and businesses.

It was intended to strengthen the country's infrastructure, build technology-driven systems and leverage India's demographic dividend to boost the economy by stimulating domestic demand and protecting it from external shocks. The government announced a package of Rupees 20 lakh crore, about 10% of GDP, to provide support to MSMEs, labourers, fishermen, animal herders, farmers and other vulnerable sections. The government also announced reforms and privatisation in sectors like space and atomic energy, mining and defence, and initiated amendments in the Companies Act in order to make compliance easier for Startups and small companies. This campaign was expected to make India a stronger player in global supply chains.

The successful implementation of the 'Make in India' and 'Skill India' initiatives for almost a decade, and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' for almost 5 years, has acted as an economic shield, enabling India to be prepared to endure the impacts of historical turning points and economic events of a global nature. India could withstand the far-reaching impacts of the high tariffs imposed by the USA in April 2025 as domestic manufacturing had already been strengthened and India was, to a large extent, on the path to self-reliance in key sectors like electronics, steel and pharmaceuticals.

By encouraging multinational corporations to set up production units in India, 'Make in India' played a crucial role in diversifying the supply chain and reducing dependence on imports of foreign goods. The PLI schemes encouraged domestic manufacturers to increase local production, especially in the key sectors. The 'Vocal for Local' campaign lowered dependence on imports, thus helping minimise the impact of international trade tensions. Support provided by the government to MSMEs helped them to tide over the hardships imposed by tariff wars. Sustained domestic demand and a growing local manufacturing sector helped arrest rising levels of unemployment. Market diversification and expanding trade with the UAE, Europe and other countries also contributed to lowering the negative impact of high US tariffs on our export sector. The right policy mix promoting economic self-reliance has been the biggest factor that has helped India to turn a potential threat (imposed by the USA tariff actions) into an opportunity for growth.

This issue of *Indian Journal of Social Enquiry* raises several pertinent issues which look back into the learnings from the past that help the society and economy develop within a sustainable framework. The opening article by Navendu Shekhar & Anannya Bohidar titled 'Pilgrimage and Temple Economy in Early Medieval Kashmir (c. 625-1012 CE)' examines the impact of pilgrimages and temples in the socioeconomic development of Jammu and Kashmir which has hitherto not been paid attention to as historiography has

focused its lens on temples as centrifugal forces largely in southern India. Deepak Raj too in his insightful article titled 'Time-expired Labourers in Indenture Labour Regime' offers a neo historical perspective on the identity and role of time-expired indenture labourers by looking into the hegemonic dynamics of coercion and autonomy within the indenture system.

Akankshya Pani offers a comparative study of the policy frameworks and governance of healthcare and its effects in Kerala and Gujarat. Her research examines the diverging approaches adopted by the two states i.e the community led approach in Kerala vis-à-vis the market-driven, privatised healthcare regime in Gujarat. It argues for stronger regulatory frameworks and increased public-private partnerships for a more effective outcome. The next two articles are our offering for those interested in literature and popular culture. 'Performing Subjective Motherhood: An Analysis of Pop-Culture TV Series' by Deepanshi Gupta used the performative theory by Judith Butler to posit that designated roles in society are products of discourses, the focus here being on motherhood as it is inscribed and also challenged by an examination of select popular TV dramas. Tanishka, on the other hand, in 'Love in Strange Lands: Fetishising the Foreign Subject in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*' looks at interracial desire within the post-colonial discourse as rooted in fetish disguised as quest for love. This is highlighted through an indepth analysis of relationships in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*.

Akansha Rai & Nibedita Khuntia in a very pertinent article, 'Unravelling the Particulate Matter & Air Quality Index at Anand Vihar, Delhi: Trends, Exceedances and Meteorological Influences' undertake a quantitative analysis of particulate matters and AQI, along with meteorological parameters, over 6 years (2019-2024) at Anand Vihar, Delhi. Their findings are extremely relevant and pertinent given the increasing health hazards on account of rising AQI. The concluding article by Dilip Kumar titled, 'Nitish Kumar's Leadership in Bihar: Balancing Social Justice with Development-oriented Governance' offers a detailed analysis of Nitish Kumar's political trajectory and the impact it has had on the state of Bihar.

This issue like the previous ones covers a wide spectrum from the converging fields of economy, history, political science as well as literature. We acknowledge the efforts of our reviewers which has enhanced the quality of our publications and hope our readers continue to benefit from the wide array of articles published here and find food for thought for further research.