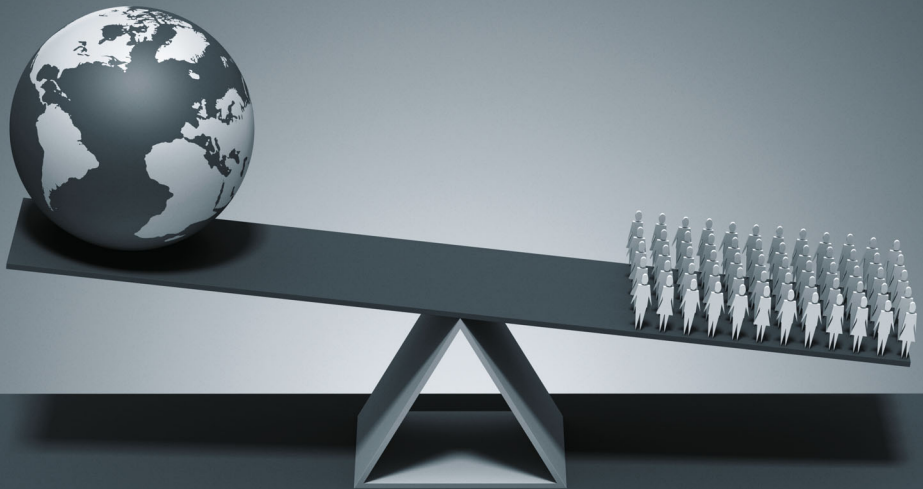




# Deparochialising Global Justice

Global Poverty, Human Rights  
Cosmopolitanism and India's Superrich

Aejaz Ahmad Wani



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## Deparochialising Global Justice

“Dr. Wani’s book shows how the debates about global justice have often been framed in very West-centric terms. It demonstrates why a ‘deparochialised’ account of global justice is necessary and how it provides a richer, more sophisticated understanding of what global justice requires today.”

—Simon Caney, *Professor, Department of Politics & International Studies  
University of Warwick*

“Taking a critical look at the global justice debate and acknowledging inequalities within India, this excellent work relentlessly draws attention to the many faces of inequality. Inequality tracks the heels of all societies, global and local. Theorists need to address a double malaise. Dr. Wani raises provocative questions about existing theories. This is the strength of this remarkable book.”

—Neera Chandhoke, *Former Professor, Department of Political Science,  
University of Delhi*

“Dr Wani’s book is an invaluable contribution to de-parochialising the theorising of global distributive injustice in an increasingly multipolar and economically unequal world.”

—Julian Culp, *Associate Professor, Program Coordinator for Philosophy, The  
American University of Paris*

“Dr. Aejaz Ahmad Wani’s book offers fresh consideration of duties of justice owed by the economic and political elites of the developing world. The author’s “critical departure” from Western-centric scholarship is a worthwhile addition to discussions that begin from the work of Amartya Sen, Thomas Pogge, and Aakash Singh Rathore.”

—Eric Palmer, *Professor of Philosophy Allegheny College, Pennsylvania*

“In this important and very timely work, Aejaz Ahmad Wani not only contributes valuable insights into recent dialogue around the deparochialisation of global justice dialogues, but he offers distinctive new ways to think through the issues. Wani rejects approaches entailing a withdrawal from engagement with the Western authors (and themes) who have been prevalent in global justice debates. He advocates instead an approach in which a critical cosmopolitan lens is aimed at all potential agents of justice and injustice. He gives attention to the expanding set of superrich persons in countries such as India, examining

their potential duties and implications in global justice/injustice. In doing so, he models one compelling way of thinking through a more genuinely global approach to global justice.”

—Luis Cabrera, *Professor and Head, School of Government & International Relations, Griffith University, Australia*

“Aejaz Ahmad Wani makes an excellent and timely intervention to deparochialise global justice scholarship. It’s important, as he deftly argues, to widen the moral compass of cosmopolitan responsibility and institutional action toward reducing persistent patterns of poverty and rising inequality gaps.”

—Ashok Acharya, *Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi*

“Lucid, comprehensive, and sensible! It is a reasoned account of penetrating arguments offering an alternate way of theorising global justice. By situating India’s superrich as ‘agents’ of perpetuating global poverty, it re-locates the terrain of theory that moves beyond the West, and is, thus, a successful endeavour to push forth the case for comparative political theory in the domain of global justice.”

—Javid Ahmad Dar, *Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar*

“Dr. Wani’s ground-breaking book articulates the debate on global justice by fearlessly navigating through the complexities of West-centrism and offers analytical modes of critique without reproducing insular categories. Challenging the status quo in this controversy, it argues that the affluent beneficiaries of a common pool of resources and institutional support owe a great deal of assistance to the poor. The argument thereby advances the debate on global justice towards taking a transformative turn. The book acquires a strong policy orientation, calling for a concerted effort to address poverty and inequality. It is a highly readable work even for those interested in emerging plutocracies.”

—Bijoy H. Boruah, *Former Professor of Philosophy, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi*

Aejaz Ahmad Wani

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ISBN 978-981-97-5383-3      ISBN 978-981-97-5384-0 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-5384-0>

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*To my mother and grandmother,  
the two amazing architects of my resilience*

## PREFACE

Increasingly, the domain of global justice is entering a period of disenchantment, largely due to its West-centricity, parochial and exclusionary theoretical formulations. To deparochialise and pluralise the theoretical terrain of global justice, mainstream theorists must pursue an inclusive agenda and engage in inter-cultural referencing. This book calls for global justice theorists in the mainstream to self-reflect and encourage such an inclusive and self-critical agenda in global justice. It also urges critical theorists from the “margins” to engage with and contribute to theorisations on “glocal problems”—or the problems that penetrate the local-global spaces. Without this dual-edged agenda and critical reconciliation, the whole gamut of global justice is on the verge of becoming redundant and self-serving, at least from the non-Western standpoint. This work offers a deparochial exposition of global justice, or more specifically, a reassessment of theoretical foundations of agency, culpability and duties in the global poverty debate.

The idea behind this deparochial endeavour sprang from my curiosity about the question of agency and its location in global justice, and how its consideration or non-consideration impacts its subject matter and core conceptual categories. In its social parlance, the idea of agency has an inevitable reference to the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, the oppressed and the colonised. Its importance lies in the way of its determination by structures or institutions, limiting or enabling the position, location and status of the agents within societal spheres. Theorists of

global poverty recognise the limited agency of the poor in the developing world to challenge the oppressive global economic institutional arrangements and perhaps fairly deem them liable for compensation. Mapping the role of the superrich in global poverty brings into focus a different construal of *agency*. It is not the postcolonial conception of the agency of subalterns or the “wretched of the earth”. On the contrary, it is the agency of the superrich as national and transnational actors. The world’s plutocrats are a part of the economic structure that shapes the destiny of the vast majority of people, especially the poor. In debates on poverty, climate change and pollution, arguments made for a differentiated scheme of responsibilities for addressing impoverishment of people are grounded, and fairly so, in rampant poverty, low level of economic development and colonial history of the developing world. Interestingly, these arguments and justifications accord the same agency status to the superrich as to the poor of the developing world. Against the backdrop of growing plutonic tendencies in the rising powers, such as India, China and Brazil, the recognition of this nuanced distinction between the two agency questions is key to understanding the culpability of the superrich for systemic poverty in the developing world.

Duties of global justice in Cosmopolitan theorisations appear to be conceived in a parochial and provincial manner. In a deparochial framework of global justice developed in this book, the location of agents in the global distribution of wealth, power and resources is integral to the determination of duties of global justice. The rising powers or their superrich being the active participants and beneficiaries of the global economic order must shoulder some responsibilities, if not equal, for ameliorating deprivations and inequality in these regions. With the ever-increasing power and resources, the rising powers must assume greater responsibility in global affairs and outcomes. So, what kind of responsibilities shall follow depends essentially on the kind of power and impact the rise of the superrich has on the people, particularly the poor. The “post-corporate capitalist world” is dominated by the superrich, who are rapidly assuming control of both national and transnational spaces. The rising powers are beating out the developed countries in their own game of producing or allowing to produce the “superrichdom”. The superrich wield exemplary wealth, resources and power; how this great fortune comes about and what it does to equally plausible rights and claims of the multitude, it is argued, could be a basis for great moral and practical discussions on their responsibilities. The impact of this buoyant power and influence can



be mapped through the language of human rights, which constitutes the widely accepted grammar of justice. As capacious agents alongside states, their agency and role cannot be overlooked simply because they are the newly born agents of the once-poor or not-so-developed world.

India is a whirlwind of paradoxical transformations. On the one hand, it has made a major stride as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. India's billionaires stand out as a representative image of a growing and self-conscious country, breaking free from colonial shackles and socialist constraints. On the other hand, apprehensions about rising inequality are more palpable than ever. Poverty rates have halved for sure, but still a larger chunk of the world's poor live in the country. On the other side, the emergent and responsible India has begun refusing to solicit any humanitarian assistance from the developed world. How is India's rise, most importantly the proliferation of the superrich in the country and abroad, to be interpreted in terms of its national and global commitments, whether those are for upholding the human rights of the poor or shouldering climate responsibilities? These questions have never been more relevant than they are today.

This study is not about poverty itself, its manifestations, measures and prevalence in India or elsewhere. It is rather about the responsibilities that the affluent among us must shoulder towards those who are reeling in poverty; not just because they ought to, but because their conduct has long-lasting effects on the realisation of their rights. Much has been said and written about the superrich, eulogising and fetishising their entrepreneurial prowess, net-worth, lifestyles and assets. This work attends to the flipside of the coin and critically examines the repercussions of emerging plutonomy on the poor in India. It reflects the assessment of market-oriented nations from the standpoints of their own stated claims, frameworks, assumptions and expectations.

Today's plutocrats are vastly emerging in democracies. In the absence of strong safety nets, liberal democracies lack built-in limitarian strategies to counter the increasing concentration of wealth and ensure the benefits of economic growth reach the bottom half. There is certainly something more that is required of democracies than is currently expected. The concentration of wealth in the fewer hands has a long-term effect on the distribution and the effectiveness of political power. The political leverage that is gained in the economic sphere easily translates into visible and invisible forms of domination. The pursuit of commercial interests at the expense of public good leaves an indelible mark on the

future distribution of wealth and political power. That is how this loop completes and reproduces itself. The bending of rules in favour of the superrich is in itself a systemic violation of rights, after all the world's poor continue to be the most vulnerable wherever they find themselves. The book brings into focus the institutional violations caused by the very process by which many billionaires are produced and allowed to reproduce wealth unbound. Fragile and porous institutions make it difficult for the poor to resist policies that are harmful to them. Justice is all about the right arrangement of institutions, and the assurance of their continuous and impartial functioning is key to peaceful and just societies. There is thus intricate relationship between poverty alleviation (SDG 1), reduction of inequalities (SDG 10), and the achievement of peace, justice and inclusive institutions (SDG 16) within and across societies.

Before embarking on this journey, I have a few upfront disclaimers to make. Large swathes of this book ruminate about India's superrich, but I must admit that any kind of research on the superrich is akin to chasing fleeting shadows. Perhaps because there is very little usable material out there. The available material is largely journalistic, scattered and assumptive. This may partly explain why political scientists, political economists and sociologists have yet to traverse into the complex world of the superrich and their interface with politics, economy and society within particular nations. The material used in this book has been mined from scattered sources. In the absence of primary surveys and interviews, I have relied on numerous databases, reports from the government, national and international agencies, business newspapers and published interviews of billionaires. This piece of work does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of Indian plutonomy, which, given the lack of reliable material, would be a herculean task if not downright impossible. In fact, the available support-bank to research in such domains is not generally encouraged. This book is written with a theorist's gaze and is bolstered by a political-economic analysis of limited material that I have been able to locate over the last more than eight years.

Moreover, this work must not be interpreted as a radical argument for the abolition of the superrich, less so for returning to the dirigisme. The superrich can, and in fact, do a lot of positive and transformative work for the disadvantaged, to say the least. That said, there is just one overarching concern: the absence of limitarian strategies enables a Mathew Effect, making it very difficult for everyone else to rise from the ashes. The accumulated capital has an inevitable fall into the political sphere, and

when that happens, it reproduces wealth for the few and corresponding deprivations for the many. Last but not least, this is also not an argument against the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” or the general right of developing countries to resist the noxious and unfair global commitments. It merely attempts to urge the readers to consider the powerful agency of the super-wealthy class, its impact on the prospects of the multitude and the duties they must shoulder to address poverty and inequality. I expect that this intervention will serve to nudge researchers better trained in the field to explore the terrain in more nuanced ways.

Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir,  
India  
April 2024

Dr. Aejaz Ahmad Wani

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a thoroughly revised and extended version of my doctoral thesis I wrote at University of Kashmir in 2017–2022. The entire writing journey has been possible due to the companionship and camaraderie of a non-exhaustive list of people and their unwavering support and assistance. I can hardly think of giving an order to that long list. Nevertheless, first things first.

I thank Dr. Javid Ahmad Dar for graciously agreeing to supervise my doctoral research. Working with him has been an immensely enriching experience, academically and personally. Without his guidance and support, this work would not have been possible. His own work on Amartya Sen proved very important for my endeavour to graft comparative political theory in global justice research. I am grateful to Prof. Ashok Acharya for introducing me to the world of political ethics and global justice during my Masters at the University of Delhi. His strong faith in my academic endeavours and the support he provided all these years have been exceptional. I also thank Prof. Tabasum Firdous for her valuable support and encouragement over the last two years.

I am profoundly grateful to Prof. Simon Caney, Prof. Luis Cabrera, Prof. Neera Chandhoke and Prof. Bijoy Boruah for their comments on some important parts of this book. Prof. Eric Palmer has been very considerate and forthcoming. Along with him, I thank Dr. Julian Culp and Prof. Jay Drydyk for their insightful comments on some parts of Chapter 3 which first appeared in *Journal of Global Ethics*. I also benefited

from Dr. Sanjeeda Warsi's inquiries and comments during my doctoral presentations at the Department of Political Science. I am also grateful to Prof. Peerzada Irshad Ahmad Shah, Prof. Gull Wani, Dr. Anjum Ara, Dr. Showkat Ahmad, Dr. Sakeena Hassan, Dr. Shah Nawaz Qadri for their support at the Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the amazing faculty members and scholars of the DHSS at the Indian Institute of Technology Jammu with whom I discussed parts of this work last year. The critical questions and the feedback provided by Prof. Bijoy Boruah, Dr. Sayantan Mandal, Prof. Daru Arun Kumar, Dr. Joby Varghese, Dr. Sukanya Mondal and Sheriya Sareen helped inject some pivotal ideas into this book.

This work passed through the crucible of our research collective; each colleague contributed immense value to it. Asmat Zainab has been a steadfast supporter and a beacon of strength. During excruciating moments, she motivated me to keep up with the bookwork. Rouf Ahmad Dar has been a good chum, colleague and uplifter. My invigorating discussions on billionaires with him were immensely rewarding. On a lighter note, his art of "gastronomy" alleviated the food stress of our research collective half a decade. The hangover remains! Nida Fatima's calm demeanour as a colleague has equally been uplifting and her engagement with deparochialisation as an approach in comparative political theory has aided mine. Touqeer Nazir lifted my spirits in sombre moments and never said no even to my forceful requests.

Spatial elements are always crucial in any process of imagining and writing. If the Department of Political Science witnessed the making of my doctoral thesis, Kashmir University's Iqbal Library saw its transformation into the book. At Mir's Chai Point at the rear end of the University, I have had infinite conversations on the subject matter over the last six years and many of them bequeathed value to this book. Lal Bazar became my primal abode, and much of the essential work could be possible due to a special family I have lived with for the last few years. Uncle, Sister, Nishu and Junaid provided me with care and comfort I couldn't have imagined elsewhere.

Valuable friendships have illuminated every bit of this journey with laughter and encouragement. Special mentions include Waseem Nehvi, Tafazul Hussian, Asif Mohiuddin, Iram Qureshi, Adil Yaseen, Tanya Sharma, Shazia Majid, Ikshula Arora, Peerzada Sabzar, Qayoom Bhat, Shivangi Sharma, Liyaqat Bhat, Fozia Jan, Rupak Kumar, Ashfaq Maqsood, Divyendu Jha, Zakir Hussain, Zohra Batool, Adil Thakur, Javid

Ahangar, Touseef Ahmad, Suhail Mir, Showkat Bhat, Basharat Shameem, Faizan Bhat, Zahoor Bhat, Manzoor Padder, Mansoor Ahmad, Waseem Bhat, Aadil Qayoom, Anayat Mugloo, Umar Mirza, Tahir Bhat, Gowhar Quadir, Arshad Iqbal, and many others. Ashiq Hussain has been constant pillar of support for my initiatives and ideas. I owe Dr. Waseem Sofi a great debt of thanks for his kind assistance and advice in preparing this book. His book with Palgrave Macmillan served as a guiding template for this work. Special thanks also go to Mir Nowreen for her support all these years. I was also lucky to be accompanied by a small cohort of student-cum-friends who elated my mood when I needed it the most. In that long list, Sajjad Chowdhary, Ishfaq Yaseen, Muneer Bhagat, Mir Muneeb, Mir Yasin, Muntazir Ali and Sumaya Mushtaq deserve special attributions.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many others who helped clear the intellectual and argumentative path of the book. Dr. Idris Kant's emphasis on methodological rigour kept me alert. Saalim Bhat read parts of this book several times over. His provocative inquiries and comments added value and depth to the arguments and analysis, especially on the "normative-ethical frameworks" worked out in the book. I am especially indebted to colleagues and friends who offered invaluable technical advice and assistance on crucial economic aspects, concepts and data presentation. This includes Dr. Sajad Bhat, Suaid Ahmad, Dr. Javaid Bhat, Dr. Syed Owais, Dr. Shubarat Bhat. Moreover, Dr. Ajmal Ahmad Shah, Dr. Younis Rashid, Dr. Javaid Ahmad Khan, Dr. Habibullah Shah, and Elizabeth Mariam kept me motivated on campus. At Amar Singh College, I was fortunate to receive immense support and encouragement from my colleagues; Dr. Mushtaq Ahmad Rather, Dr. Zubair Nazeer, Prof. Hilal Ahmad, Dr. Tahir Ahmad, Dr. Shahnawaz Ahmad, Dr. Isaq Ahmad, Dr. Parvez Ahmad and many others. My sincere gratitude and appreciation go to Bushra Zahoor, a brilliant student and thinker, not just for reading and reviewing several drafts of the book but also for making crucial edits to the final draft. Tanya and Ummul reviewed numerous drafts of the chapters and offered valuable feedback.

I express my gratitude for the funding provided by the University Grants Commission through the Junior (2017–2019) and Senior Research Fellowships (2019–2022) that I received during my doctoral program. I must also acknowledge that the major ideas and parts of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this book were originally published in *Journal of Global Ethics* (Volume 19, Issue 1 (2023) 22–42) and *India Review*

(Volume 22, Issue 4 (2023) 361–396), respectively. Both have been thoroughly revised and expanded for the purpose of this book with prior permission from Taylor and Francis.

Most important of all, I express unconditional gratitude to my parents, grandparents and siblings for their selfless support. They fuelled my determination and aspirations throughout these years, and without their support, this book would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to thank Aparajita Singh and Hemapriya Eswanth at Palgrave Macmillan for bringing this book to fruition. Throughout the publication process, they have been very responsive and patient with my frequent emails, requests and occasional delays.

Aejaz Ahmad Wani

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ASSOCHAM	Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
DRD	Declaration on the Right to Development
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPBHR	Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Cosmopolitanism
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INC	Indian National Congress
MCA	Ministry of Corporate Affairs
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
M RTP	Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices
NAPBH	National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NFSA	National Food Security Act
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NVGs	National Voluntary Guidelines
PDS	Public Distribution System
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RDP	Redistributive Distributive Principle
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNWG	United Nations Working Group
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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