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# **Special Paper Section**



## Impacts of Climate Change on GCC Countries and their Negotiation Trends

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### Abstract

*This paper has presented the effect of climate change on the major economic sectors of the region. The paper also put forward the point that as far as climate negotiation strategy is concerned, while upholding economic diversification policy at the centre, GCC countries witnessed two trends: one is the 'coalition effort' to collectively agree to sign and accept the challenges posited by developed countries, and the other is the 'lone effort' in adopting various adaptation and mitigation measures by each country, focusing on renewables and energy efficient measures and declaration of net-zero targets. Though initially reluctant, all GCC countries have established some institutional measures to address and investigate climate change-related issues. However, more investment in conducting deeper research is imperative among GCC countries to draw a better conclusion about climate change and adopt plausible Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) and carbon market trading to their benefit.*

**Keywords:** Climate change; GCC countries, Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM)

### Introduction

As the impact of climate change has started to unfold across the world, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising six Arab countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, has experienced some of the worst natural calamities in recent years, including frequent heatwaves, floods, and droughts, resulting in adverse impacts on many important sectors of their economies (ESCWA, ACSAD, et al. 2017, 29). In this response, the group has undertaken various measures to address the climate change issue and mitigate its impacts. They have adopted various negotiation trends and approaches at various forums, starting from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement and beyond.

Time and again, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has reported that the world temperature has become one degree Celsius warmer and may rise near to 1.5°C very soon in relation to the industrial period (Arias, et al. 2021, 56). Taking this into cognisance, the global North and South have entered into various global climate-related negotiations. In these negotiations, the two global zones acknowledged their past actions and are obliged to develop their contributions to limit emissions and control the earth's temperature based on the pre-industrial era. The GCC countries have also acceded to the global

efforts in combating climate change and have developed their climate policy in alignment with international agreements, though some countries are still reluctant and struggling to meet the targets.

Having a total oil reserve of over 30 per cent and natural gas of 20 per cent, the economies of the GCC countries are largely shaped by these reserves. However, a fossil fuel-based economy has become a central concern for the GCC countries in the various international climate negotiation forums as the global efforts to combat climate change, especially policies that aimed to reduce fossil consumption, would have direct impacts on the economic losses of these countries (Al-Sarihi and Mason 2020, 1226-1228). In this situation, while acceding to global efforts to combat the climate crisis, the GCC countries have adopted the 'market precautionary approach' by formulating a strategy of economic diversification. Also, they have highlighted the transitional nature of their economies and have taken climate change negotiations at different levels by linking it directly with the future prospects of growth and development. In recent decades, while acceding to the Kyoto Protocol, which is expected to incur economic losses to GCC countries, and with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) as a sustainable way out, they have negotiated climate change that is acceptable to their domestic economic demands. More specifically, it converges with the special circumstances of these countries, which are highly dependent on the oil-based economy. For them, the formulation of climate action, including domestic adaptation and mitigation measures, is deeply governed by international carbon market price and economic diversification policies.

Though the GCC countries have made ambitious goals both in terms of supporting economic diversification and environment sustainability by promoting renewables and net-zero emissions, more investment and in-depth research in this field have been felt by these countries to streamline the achievement of their green targets.

### **Climate Change in GCC Countries and its Impact**

Given the peninsular geographical settings, arid climatic conditions, and an economy heavily dependent on oil exploration, the GCC countries are expected to warm twice as fast as other parts of the world. Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP), which is a climate modelling tool developed by the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), has come out with four different pathways; RCP 2.6, RCP 4.5, RCP 6.0 and RCP 8.5 (ESCWA, ACSAD, et al. 2017, 87-88). Each pathway represents a broad range of climate outcomes; whereas RCP 4.5 expresses a moderate-emissions layout, RCP 8.5 expresses a high-emissions or "business as usual" layout. In the RCP 4.5 projection, the average mean temperature of the

region is likely to rise by 1.2°C – 1.9°C in the mid-century and 1.5°C – 2.3°C by the end of this century. The RCP 8.5 projection depicts a temperature rise of 1.7°C – 2.6°C during the mid-century and 3.2°C – 4.8°C by the end of this century. Moreover, the ‘highest increases in average mean temperature in the Arab region are projected in the non-coastal areas, including the Maghreb, the upper Nile River Valley’ (ESCWA, ACSAD, et al. 2017, 325). The temperature has exceeded 50°C in some of the coastal and interior areas of the Arabian Peninsula, as Jeddah recorded 52°C in 2010 (Almazroui, et al. 2014, 808). Similarly, in Kuwait, the meteorological department reported 54°C at Mitribah in 2016. Such reports support previous studies that predicted the tendency of warming of the various zones of the Peninsula (Lelieveld, et al. 2016, 249-250) (Pal and Eltahir 2015, 197-198).

The region has experienced many climate-related issues, such as fast-depleting water resources, decreasing agricultural productivity, growing unsustainability of livestock, shrinking forestry and fishery resources, etc. Increasingly, water availability is becoming an important concern in the region, and, as per the UN report, the GCC countries already fall under the category of water-scarce countries (Samad and Bruno 2013, 4). A study highlights that the water resources in the Arab world, including the GCC countries, are dwindling and are expected to reach a critical level by 2025 (Tolba and saab 2009, VII). In the case of Saudi Arabia, the situation is even worse as it has scarce water resources and no perennial river. With the increase in average temperature, a substantial decline in the annual rainfall has also been experienced in the last five decades (Haque and Khan 2022, 3). Future forecasts of rainfall show a further decline in various places of the kingdom (Tarawneh and Chowdhury 2018, 15-16). This increases the kingdom's vulnerability to adverse effects of climate change on all major sectors of the economy, including agriculture (Haque and Khan 2022, 14). The incidence of more drought would be followed by decreased rainfall, severe land degradation, and rising temperatures in the future (Hermans and McLeman 2021, 236-238). Therefore, water resource management is an urgent regional issue.

Linked to water scarcity, another important impact of climate change among GCC countries is on agriculture. The changing pattern of climatic factors would directly impact the region's major food crops, including wheat, potatoes, maize, sorghum, vegetables, and olives (Fuglie 2021, 294-295). With the exception of a few cash crops like cotton, most water-dependent crops are expected to have a negative impact, with a reduction in their production yield, as 50 per cent of the lands of the region fall under the low water availability category (ESCWA, ACSAD, et al. 2017, 205-213). A study has predicted that the cultivation of date palm may perhaps be difficult in some zones of the Arabian Peninsula due to an increase in temperature (Allded, Kumar and Shabani 2017, 1203-1205). Moreover, it is projected that the kingdom

will experience a 3 to 5° C rise in temperature by the end of the twenty-first century (Williams, et al. 2012, 124). Such a situation would drastically affect the availability of water for irrigation and crop cultivation in the kingdom. Given the existing scenario, agricultural productivity would be worse affected in Saudi Arabia and in the other GCC countries due to climate change, which has huge repercussions on the food security of the region (Haque and Khan 2022, 14-15).

Apart from water and agriculture, climatic variations will probably disturb the naturally established process of vectors' selections, with certain geographical areas likely to become inhospitable for some vectors and others likely to favour the transmission of vector-borne diseases. A study in Saudi Arabia found that 'the rise in temperature is associated with the rise in vector-borne diseases such as Zika, dengue, yellow fever, and chikungunya' (Alahmed, et al. 2019, 2). Rising heat waves may threaten the health and well-being of the people as humidity and extreme temperature constitute a significant cause of mortality in the region. A study reported that the GCC region falls under the most vulnerable category for heat stroke (ESCWA, ACSAD, et al. 2017, 293). Another study found that 'high temperature, high ultraviolet index, low wind speed, and low relative humidity are contributors to increased MERS-CoV cases' (Altamimi and Ahmed 2020, 708). A similar study reports a higher incidence of MERS-CoV in summer months across the GCC countries (Aly, et al. 2017, 7).

### **GCC Countries and Climate Change Negotiation**

The GCC countries were initially reluctant to participate in international climate change commitments. However, in the 1990s, GCC countries gradually started contributing their share in climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives and signed major climate agreements such as UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol. The latest in this line is their active participation in the various negotiation efforts in the Paris Agreement. The negotiation strategies they adopted are an astute 'market precautionary approach' while discerning the importance of both economic diversification and climate change issues. All the GCC countries have argued for the diversification of their economies on the point of their over-dependence on oil exports. While observing the current status of climate initiatives undertaken, the GCC countries took a move of both the 'coalition effort' and 'lone effort' concerning renewables, energy efficiency targets, and declaration of net-zero emission.

### **Coalition Effort**

Until recently, the Gulf countries have not committed to set carbon emissions targets. These countries were contented merely by hosting international conferences. Earlier, their ministries worked to combat climate

change with little commitment to cutting carbon emissions emanating from their economic activities, where hydrocarbon is the main source of energy. However, after the Paris Agreement, these countries have taken various climate initiatives to bring down carbon emissions (Babonneau, et al. 2023, 713-714).

In a subsequent period of time, all the GCC countries have accepted to be members of major climate negotiations such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. Except for Bahrain, they all ratified the Kyoto Protocol in the year of 2005. Bahrain ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2006. They also institutionalised dedicated agencies that addressed climate change and environmental sustainability and formulated policies related to these aspects. For example, the Environment Public Authority (EPA) in Kuwait, the Supreme Council for the Environment and Natural Reserves (SCENR) in Qatar, The General Authority of Meteorology and Environment Protection in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Supreme Council for Environment in Bahrain are responsible for environment protection and preservation-related policy formulation and implementations.

All the GCC countries fall under the non-Annex I Party of the “Kyoto Protocol”. They come under the ‘low-income developing countries’ that are eligible to enjoy the CDM of the protocol. However, All the GCC countries have signed the Paris Agreement 2015 and declared their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with emissions reduction targets except Bahrain and Kuwait. Oman, UAE and Qatar set the target of a seven per cent, 23.5 per cent and 25 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030, respectively. Saudi Arabia sets the target of the annual removal of carbon by 278 million tons by 2030 (Al-Sarihi 2021, 8).

With the current trend of many countries adopting the concept of net-zero emissions, the Gulf countries were obliged to follow the development of other countries in this field. Among countries, China has declared an impressive target with a commitment to achieve a net-zero target by 2060. The US and the EU have declared the same target to achieve by 2050. Such targets have exerted pressure on GCC countries to follow in the footsteps of these countries. Accordingly, all the GCC countries have made ambitious targets for renewables, energy efficiency (except Qatar and Oman), and net-zero emissions (except Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar), and in accordance, the respective government institutions and executive agencies have been identified and assigned to achieve a specific target (Al-Sarihi 2021, 9). Moreover, concerning technologies that are developed to cut down carbon emissions, the GCC countries have adopted CCS in their industrial activities. In the field of energy-efficient technology for environment conservation, CCS is considered one of the best options suggested by concerned experts. With this strategy, the GCC countries could streamline

the commitments made to cut down carbon emissions and achieve climate targets. Accordingly, the UAE used CCS technology in many industrial activities, of which the steel industry is the most prominent (Babonneau, et al. 2023, 714).

### **Lone Effort in Adaptation and Mitigation Measures**

Though all the GCC countries have set renewables targets, the move is complicated because each country has declared a different percentage for the share of renewables as part of climate adaptation and mitigation measures. It is ranging from five per cent by Bahrain in 2025, 50 per cent by Saudi Arabia in 2030 to 50 per cent by UAE in 2050. While some targets have distinct execution strategies such as UAE's "Way to Net Zero", others contain largely aspirational elements. (Ministry of Climate Change and Environment 2023, 40)

In 2019, the Saudi Kingdom declared an impressive renewables target of 60GW by 2030 (both from solar and wind), including the capacity from local energy production. If this plan turns into reality, the power production will nearly double the 2017 grid capacity, which would constitute a renewable capacity of 40 per cent of the total power production by 2030 (IRENA 2019, 17-20). Energy efficiency is one aspect where all GCC countries have made targets, except Qatar, with a major potential to contribute to mitigation measures. However, similar to renewables, their measurability, specificity, and binding character are generally shallow. Except for Bahrain and Kuwait, all the other GCC countries have adopted national climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. For instance, Oman developed a climate strategy called the 'National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change 2020–2040' in 2019. The strategy mandates all mega projects to report their annual emissions, adopt climate adaptation strategies, and encourage the utilisation of energy-saving technologies. In addition, Doha has also developed other climate regulations, which include mandatory climate permission for all developmental projects that emit GHG (Al-Sarihi 2021, 9).

Initially, the GCC countries were sceptical about committing to cutting carbon emissions as they considered the role of developing countries to be minimal compared to developed countries. They consider climate mitigation efforts and climate financing as unwarranted and non-mandatory (Luomi 2020, 11). Accordingly, the GCC countries have traditionally been meticulous about funding international climate finance institutions, as these countries construed it as a means of growing expectations from international

institutions regarding their contributions. However, since 2010, the UAE has been financing renewable energy projects worldwide, and Qatar made a similar pledge at a UN meeting in 2019 (Luomi 2020, 11).

### **Climate Change Negotiation in the Paris Agreement**

The Paris Agreement (Article 4.4) states that ‘developing countries are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances’ (Erbach 2016, 5). All the member countries are obliged to set their emission targets, called the NDCs. NDC is used by all the member countries as a tool to negotiate their emission targets in the Paris Agreement and beyond. Concerning carbon market trading and CDM, the GCC countries have no evidence of engaging in carbon trading and availing CDM from Annex I nations as agreed in the Paris Agreement. However, as part of post-Paris Agreement adaptation and mitigation efforts, ‘four GCC countries have set new or enhanced their GHG emissions reduction targets’ (Al-Sarihi 2021, 7).

Global communities consider quantitative targets more appropriate for estimating carbon emission reduction efforts. Almost eighty per cent of the initial NDCs submitted contain carbon emission targets, and few countries come up with action plans. Among GCC countries, Oman alone has set an emission reduction goal. The common mitigation measures of the GCC countries in their NDCs include energy efficiency, renewable energy, and carbon capture and storage. The mitigation efforts or actions are mainly governed by economic diversification policy, mention their status as an oil-based economy and stress the need to minimise the impacts of climate change. Various other measures taken by GCC countries mentioned in their NDCs are presented in the following;

1. Bahrain’s NDC has not mentioned any quantitative targets. Bahrain, being a small Island in the developing stage, is therefore given less liability and allowed to develop climate change strategies and action plans.
2. Kuwait, too, has not made any commitments on climate change targets. The country has instead focused on normal economic activity and stressed the diversification of energy production intended to ward off the increase of carbon emissions by 2035.
3. Oman has provided a carbon emission target of a meagre two per cent or below with the ongoing routine economic activities and on the condition of the international endowment. Burning of oil contributes a major proportion of the country’s carbon emissions and as such the drafting of climate policy becomes an imperative (Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs 2019). The submitted

second climate commitment has targeted a reduction of seven per cent in carbon emission by 2030 relative to the country's usual economic activities (Al-Sarihi 2021, 7).

4. Earlier, Qatar did not mention any climate targets by stating that the nation-level initiative had been made to reduce emissions by citing the export of liquified natural gas as one such effort. However, Qatar recently submitted a climate commitment in 2021, targeting a carbon emission reduction of 25 per cent by 2030 (Al-Sarihi 2021, 7).
5. Saudi's climate commitment has mentioned a carbon target but without its base year. The target is made relative to the country's vision of economic growth through the diversification of economic activities to ensure less dependence on conventional oil revenues and international aid with the ultimate aim of achieving environmental sustainability (Luomi 2020, 14). The latest climate commitment submitted in 2021 has targeted to lessen carbon emissions annually by 278 million tons by 2030, which is more than double (130 million tons) of the first commitment submitted in 2015.
6. The initial UAE's climate commitment proposed a target to upgrade renewable energy to 24 per cent in the nation's power distribution by 2021, which was later upgraded to 27 per cent. The latest commitment has made an impressive target of 50 per cent renewables by 2050 relative to the base year, including a target of 2030 and 2035 (Luomi 2020, 14).

Except for Bahrain and Kuwait, all the members of GCC have declared their NDCs with a meticulous effort to promote economic diversification on the one hand and environmental sustainability on the other. In this process, the GCC countries have adopted a 'market precautionary approach' as their economy is heavily dependent on oil-based revenues. They have made ambitious targets while diversifying their economies and have made environmental sustainability and climate change integral to their national vision. To name a few, "Bahrain Economic Vision 2030" mentioned that 'economic growth must never come at the expense of the environment and the long-term well-being of our people' (Kingdom of Bahrain 2008, 10); and "Qatar National Vision 2030" states that 'economic development and protection of the environment are two demands neither of which should be sacrificed for the sake of the other' (State of Qatar 2008, 8). Except for Bahrain and Kuwait, all the other GCC countries have adopted national climate strategies to specifically deal with carbon emissions reduction and renewable targets to challenge international pressures. (Al-Sarihi 2018, 7-8).



## Conclusion

A region with a unique geographical setting dominated by deserted land, less rainfall, and an economy largely based on oil revenues makes the GCC countries the most vulnerable region to climate change. In recent years, the region has experienced a continuous rise in temperature and the worst climate events in the past. It is evident from many research that climate change has impacted various sectors of GCC countries, including water resources, agriculture, forestry, fishery, and aquaculture. The paper, while presenting an outline of the existing climate-related programs and negotiation trends in international climate agreements, argues that since the GCC countries are still heavily dependent on the oil-based economy, the climate negotiation strategy that they have adopted is a 'market precautionary approach' which promotes economic diversification and environmental sustainability together. The paper also points out that the negotiation trend in the context of the GCC countries has witnessed both the 'coalition effort' and 'lone effort' while adopting the adaptation and mitigation strategy to respond to international challenges on climate action plans. It also infers that besides having many existing institutional settings in accordance to the climate action (both adaptation and mitigation), the GCC countries have adopted various national-level climate regulations to achieve their NDC targets, primarily in the areas of renewables, energy efficiency, and net-zero target by mid-century.

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## Indian Renaissance or Renaissance in India

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### *Abstract*

*The period of Renaissance saw a vibrant revival of humanistic influence finding expression in the blossoming of arts, literature and modern science after the middle ages, supporting the idea about the 'rise of the West.' In India, Renaissance is said to have occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today, while some historians rejoice the Europe-centred image of renaissance, few others are not only sceptical of those tall claims but also question as to how much of the Indian awakening was Europe inspired. The idea of 'India Resurging' was more of a deep-rooted and strong notion in the minds of not only many Englishmen, but also some of the Indians who came under 'majestic spell' of the colonial masters through English education. The present paper looks into tools of colonial subjugation amongst which the 'control of people's culture' for a prolonged period is seen as a potent means, for coercion as a method of domination has its limitations. There are complexities involved in imposing definitions and carving out similarities of cultures and civilizations, and thus the Indian context of Renaissance needs to be understood in all its nuances.*

The term 'Renaissance' comes from a French term *renaistre* meaning 'rebirth', coined by European historians in the nineteenth century. The origin of this term is also traced to Latin *re + nasci* which means 'to be born'. According to Merriam Webster its *first known use* was in 1837 that suggested it as a 'transitional movement' from medieval to modern times, beginning in the 14th and continuing into the 17th century. It signify the revival of art, literature, science and learning, supporting the idea about the 'rise of the West' after the Middle Ages. Most of the scholars considered this as the recovery of the traditional legacy of Greece and Rome - the revival of classical learning and wisdom after a lengthy stretch of cultural decay and stagnation. These times also saw the exploration of new continents, growth of commerce, inventions and the innovation of paper, printing, mariner's compass, gunpowder and so on. Today, while some historians rejoice the Europe-centred image of renaissance, others are sceptical of those triumphalist claims of humanity.

Renaissance in India is understood to have occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The period post-1857-59 (Indian Rebellion against the British) was marked by the socio-cultural revitalization

or 'renaissance', and political revitalization or 'nationalism'. It influenced nearly all aspect of Indian life like art, literature, culture as also the resurgence of nationalistic feelings against the English masters. Indian literature flourished with the rise of prominent writers, poets, and thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, to name just a few, who played crucial roles in shaping Indian identity and promoting national pride. Social activists like Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and others advocated for social equality, religious tolerance and sought to eradicate social evils. Many felt the necessity to revive and preserve the Indian ethos in the face of Westernization. Various revivalist movements emerged that emphasized traditional Indian values, customs, and art forms. Thus, the renaissance in India was a multifaceted phenomenon that was driven by a desire to reclaim and celebrate India's rich cultural heritage in the face of colonial domination and cultural alienation. It is apt to quote Ramsay Macdonald who said that Indian nationalism has been 'the revival of her historical tradition and the liberation of the soul of a people' (**Datta, 1965, p. 2**). However, the question is - how much of the awakening in India was Europe inspired, and to what extent were the natives keen to revivify the typical anglicized and orientalist contentions of renaissance. 'When anyone speaks in the West of the awakening of India,' Cousins remarks condescendingly, 'I think what is really meant is that India shows signs of using the tools and weapons of her masters' (**Cousins J. H., 1918, pp. 9-10**). It is rightly said, 'Colonialism is not about geographical and political control only; it is a systematic and systemic intervention through which the knowledge systems and culture of the colonized are mauled, deformed, twisted, transformed, and destroyed' (**Singh & Maheshwari, 2024, p. 1**).

The British conquest in India was a long-drawn process due to; one - the mutual rivalry amongst the different European colonial powers vying for maximum controls; two - Medieval India gave British a daunting resistance, especially the Marathas with whom they had to battle three wars. The struggles of British forces under Sir Ire Coot against Mysore, and that of Lord Lake against the Marathas, went down in the annals of British military history for records (**Panikkar, 2007, pp. 19-20**). The British technology, no doubt, was far superior but they had the limitation of manpower. It was this reason that the scheme of alliances was resorted to by almost all the imperialist powers with the objective of lessening the travails of war. These points are emphasised to bring out the importance of an instrument of colonial transformation that favourably figured on the agenda of almost all the colonial dispensations in the world. The most prevailing and profound tool of colonising a people for a prolonged period is influencing their *culture*, for coercion as a method of domination has its limitations. Culture of a society signify its life in all vibrancy which includes arts, religion, language, institutions, morality, codes of behaviour, structures of law and

beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. Thus, to bring about changes in the culture of a society or a people may be an arduous task but certainly facilitates a long-lasting, rather immutable control over the colonised. The methodology ranges from critical scrutiny, rejections and denigration to appropriation and hegemonization of the native cultures.

Nonetheless, it is not about dismissing everything that the British did in India. No doubt, the British overpowered India for commercial purposes but they also had some positive and lasting impact on India's "wounded civilization" by acquainting her with modern institutions, science and the English philological idioms (Sanyal, 2008, pp. 28-9). The growing association with the liberal and progressive political thought of the west through western education, and the exposure to the revolutions of modern Europe, 'saturated the minds of some educated Indians with the ideas of liberalism, civic liberty and national freedom'. But, the daunting task of national regeneration would not have been possible but for a 'genuine urge' and a 'spirit of renaissance' of her own people to liberate themselves from the 'crushing load of unreason, social abuse and political servitude' (Datta, 1965, pp. 1-2). Thus, the irony and the trajectory of long association with a colonial culture, and the underlying predicament of a colonised people needs to be assessed in all its degrees. An important perspective is underlined in this context, initially "the new wine of Western learning" intoxicated many youth of Bengal leading to "denationalising tendencies" in their minds. But, it were the religious and social reform movements of the times that halted the malicious effects of aimless pretensions of an "imposing civilization" and maintained the "dignity of our national culture." (Datta, 1965, p. 2)

The colonial middle class which was the product of cultural and other changes stimulated by the colonial intervention became their active collaborator in the consented domination, though they rejected of it later. Panikkar cites the African novelist Ngugi Wa Thiongo who identifies the peculiar tendency of all imperialist forces to effect the social transformation of a dependency as - 'cultural bomb' that tears into the indigenous culture by annihilating people's 'belief', 'unity' 'language' 'environment' and 'heritage'. Colonialism not only denies history to the colonised but restricts and disrupts the course of their development. The trajectory of development is interjected by bringing about the changes that are premised on the subservience of the native culture. Admonition of the indigenous cultural achievements by Macaulay clearly echoed the disquiets of the imperial masters for pushing hegemonization, using the sophisticated middle class as the 'carriers and disseminators of colonial culture.' Thus, the imperial policies were double-edged – 'denigration or destruction on one hand and hegemonization on the other' (Panikkar, 2007, pp. 20-23). Panikkar strikes hard when he says, 'Most of the rich museums in Europe and England are in fact

colonial museums. The name of the British museum...is a misnomer, for there is nothing British about it except the evidence of their history of colonial plunder.' (Panikkar, 2007, p. 20)

The cultural changes that the British initiated in India were typically distinctive of the 'ruler - ruled' matrix typical of a colonial subjugation. Panikkar describes this cultural tragedy as the 'worst pathology of colonial domination' because it deprives the colonised a freedom to the culture of their own, 'without actually providing full access to the other.' For example, if we see the response of the natives especially the Muslims and the Hindus to the cultural hegemonization of the imperial masters, in effect it was inward-looking, striving to give a fresh lease of life to the traditions and practices through introspection. The Hindus identified themselves with the ancient past that helped them to provide a feeling of pride in the accomplishments of the golden age. Their interest and exposure in the realm of spirituality led them to recognise 'Hinduism as a superior religion' instead of universalism. But, the "mediation of communal history" as the play-factor in the growth of a "sectarian consciousness" was cleverly employed by colonial ideologues like James Mill who "conveniently" utilized it to project a "communitarian view of India's past", later picked up and "internalised" by the members of the middle class especially those who were "religiously inclined". (Panikkar, 2007, pp. 23-25).

It is crucial to understand that the colonial motive was not only 'appropriation' but the sheer 'denial of a valid history' to the colonized, as can be gaged from the idea of 'changeless Indian society', a myth promulgated by the English masters and later 'authenticated by imperialist historians.' In fact, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was the first person to raise the alarm about the colonially constructed history and even proposed an agenda for Indian historiography. But, by the time his warning could be cognized, the colonial version of history and its vocabulary were integral features of the well-informed and the intellectual middle class facilitated in the modules of 'periodization of Indian history' by James Mill; 'description of social customs' by Marshman; 'account of religious practices' by Henry Beveridge; and the 'explanation of the British military success' by Robert Orme. The result was, the Indian intelligentsia accepted its 'own history through the colonial prism', the clear example being 'rationalizing the colonial conquest' as "divine dispensation" (Panikkar, 2007, pp. 122-23).

### **Understanding the Phenomena of 'Indian Renaissance' and 'Renaissance in India'**

The title of this paper is inspired by J. H. Cousins and his work, *The Renaissance in India* (1918). As a young Theosophist, Cousins came to India in 1915 under the patronage of Mrs Annie Besant and spent the later year of his life in the country embracing an Indian system of life, inspiring and serving a people whom

he found were meshed in a struggle for freedom very similar to the people in his own country - Ireland. He settled in Madras and initially took up the sub-editorship of the theosophical Journal - *The New India*, after which he got interested in Indian philosophy, art, music, culture and education. He produced several works including an autobiography written jointly with his wife Margaret E. Cousins (**Cousins & Cousins, 1950**). Two cords that resonated closely with Cousins in India were: one, the struggle of the Indian people against the British Empire and two, the spiritual affinity between his country and India, for Cousins believed that spiritually Ireland belonged to the east. Cousins writings created ripples among the Indian readers and it is not surprising that Sri Aurobindo was so impressed with his work that he wrote an essay in the monthly review, *Arya* (**November 1918**) in praise of Cousins work with the same title as that of his book – *The Renaissance in India*.

The above mentioned work by Cousins is outstanding in many ways, the most credible being the analysis of ‘Eurocentrism’ and the illusionary deception of the British being the ‘beholders of universal truth’, an imagery that was essential for the imperialist forces to justify their pressing structures of authority in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as they further proceeded to tighten their rule in India. This venture would have been difficult without projecting themselves as ‘modern’ ‘civilised’ and ‘enlightened’, and creating the concept of the ‘Other’ for the subjugated people. Needless to say that white man’s burden theory of the civilizing mission of the ‘barbarians’, ‘ignorant’, ‘rude’, ‘unrefined’, ‘savage’ and ‘brutal’ people, described by Mill, was a self-imposed and a well-thought-of project to legitimize themselves in India (**Mill, 1817**). It is interesting to understand that the publication of Mill’s work in 3 volumes coincided with East India Company acquiring the control of most of India after its triumph against the Marathas. Such imperial research projects may well be defined as *colonial master-pieces* providing the ground-hold for the imperial forces to launch their subtle incursions into the native culture and society. An important study – *Decolonising Methodologies*, shows how the imperial research projects methodically put aside even the most literate cultures as ‘uncouth’ only because they don’t match up well with the imperialist scheme of things. Pointing out the cases of India, China and Japan, which she says ‘were very literate cultures prior to their ‘discovery’ by the West, were invoked through other categories which defined them as uncivilized. Their literacy, in other words, did not count as a record of legitimate knowledge’ (**Smith, 1999, pp. 31-2**). Fanon well captures the nuances of the colonial cultural oppression as he describes the predicament of a Blackman who never felt as a “Negro” before, as he did under a ‘white domination’. The inherent paradox is that the more he chose to ascertain his culture by behaving as a ‘cultivated person’, more he apprehends that ‘history imposes on him a terrain already mapped out....and sets him along a very precise path...to



demonstrate the existence of a 'Negro' culture' (Fanon, 2004, p. 150). Such are the intricacies of imposing definitions and carving out similarities of cultures and civilizations. This is where Cousins' work stands out as it locates 'Renaissance' in the native context of India. His remarkable work opens with the lines, "this book is not about the Indian Renaissance, but about the Renaissance in India, a small difference in words but a large one in substance" (Cousins J. H., 1918, p. preface). He exclaims, "The truth is, India needs no awakening. She is wide awake. She has always been wide awake" (Cousins J. H., 1918, p. 6).

Tagore strikes a parallel cord as he says that India's past has been one of "continual social adjustment" instead of "organised power for defence and aggression". According to him India has always endeavoured to realise her mission by skilfully "regulation of differences" and secondly with the "spiritual recognition of unity" as an essential undercurrent of all tasks. (Tagore, 1917, p. 15) India's past is not merely the records of political fights for supremacy and downfall of kingdoms because the records of these days have been shunned and ignored. 'Our history is that of our social life and attainment of spiritual ideals' (Tagore, 1917, p. 16). Aurobindo rightly proclaims that Indian civilisation must be recognised as a culture no less than the Greco-Roman, the Christian, the Islamic or the later Renaissance civilisation of Europe (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 69). He further said:

Even the Greek civilisation...separated itself sharply from the non-Hellenic "barbarian" cultures and was able for some centuries to live within itself by a rich variation and internal interchange. There was the same phenomenon in ancient India of a culture living intensely from within in a profound differentiation from all surrounding cultures, its vitality rendered possible by an even greater richness of internal interchange and variation (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 50).

Cousins unhesitatingly assert that, as the West gradually became more 'conscious' about the East, it 'blandly' deduced that the 'East is awakening', whereas the reality is that the East, especially India which was aware of herself all this while, undertook the breath-taking task of 'awakening the West' (Cousins J. H., 1918, p. 10). In the same vein, Aurobindo cites Sir John Woodroffe who was amazed to find from a missionary the extent to which Hindu Pantheism started to 'permeate the religious conceptions of Germany, of America, even of England', and was considered as an "imminent danger" to the next generation. Woodroffe cites another writer who attributes 'all the highest philosophical thought of Europe to the previous thinking of the Brahmins', thus affirming that solutions to all intellectual problems of the modern times 'will be found anticipated in the East' (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 71).

So, if this is the truth then what went wrong that the country stumbled into the inertia of slumber about the thirteenth century? Indian science abruptly came to a halt and an age of 'darkness and inactivity' thwarted

nation's road forward to keep up with the developments of modern and scientific knowledge. However, the reasons for the same did not have anything to do with the 'increase or intolerance of the metaphysical tendency' taking the national mind away from reason and realities, as is generally assumed, but was a 'part of a general cessation of new intellectual activity' (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 124). A similar point is made by Sanyal when he says that the reason for the decline of India was not so much about intellectual incapability but one of 'erosion of the spirit of entrepreneurship and the openness to new ideas and enquiry' (Sanyal, 2008, p. 19). During its golden era, that is prior to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this country was open to innovations, foreign trade, ideas and travellers who visited to learn and discover. 'Foreign students flocked to its universities even as foreign merchants flocked to its ports.' But this changed as the society increasingly became rigid and fixated in her approach towards new ideas and change, leading to its decline 'not just as an economy but as a civilization' (Sanyal, 2008, p. 2). 'The same people, who were capable of inventing algebra and calculus in the fourth century, were unwilling to learn the relatively simple technology of maintaining horses in the 13th century. Once it had been a culture that celebrated its merchant fleets but later forbade crossing the seas.' (Sanyal, 2008, p. 23)

Emphasizing similar points Aurobindo opines that India's renaissance should not be understood as a mere replication of the West, rather rooted in her own spiritual tradition and cultural identity. In his philosophy the intuitive and experiential approach takes over the rationalistic and intellectual one. He conveyed that the strength and success of India's ancient wisdom was greater in the study of human mind, the inner forces and the study of nature, than in the field of physical knowledge. It is important to note that though he believed that country's strength lay in its emphasis on the spiritual dimension of life, his spirituality wasn't about escapism but one of infusing all aspects of life with a higher purpose. In effect, any 'great and enduring philosophy' is not possible lest it is based on the 'spiritual truth of existence' (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 124). Delineating the philosophical foundation of India, Aurobindo gives four foundational principles for a human life. First, desire and enjoyment or *kama*; second, material and economic aims and the needs of the mind and body or *artha*; third, moral conduct of the individual and the laws of social life or *dharma*; and lastly, spiritual liberation that is *moksha* (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 125).

Thus, Aurobindo saw India's renaissance as potentially impactful for the entire world. He believed India's unique approach could offer a much-needed balance to the materialistic tendencies of the West. In his view, despite being the 'most civilized society in the world', and possessing a philosophical insight of the existence, 'India had been badly minimized in its civilizational glory and practice of life'. Potent cause for the same was the loss of its 'will-power and desire which slipped under the veil of ignorance about its own

glorious tradition and potentiality' (Prasad, 2022, pp. 52-3). Chapple strikes the accurate cord when he says, 'Sri Aurobindo broke away from the shackles of the colonial mindset, using his knowledge of Western philosophy combined with *Yogic* insight to subvert conventional power structures.' (Chapple, 2022, p. 223). In Europe, Renaissance was believed to be the rekindling of the ancient heritage of Greece and Rome after a protracted period of cultural decay and stagnation, also known as 'dark ages'. The question here is - does this mean that 'India has stood still, while Europe has gone on towards some bright goal and stumbled by accident upon Armageddon.'? (Cousins J. H., 1918, p. 10). The response to this is: One – can we draw a parallel in the histories of different cultures? Two - Can definitions be imported and imposed on a totally different historical, geographical, social, political and national settings, and justified so? Three –imperial definitions with respect to colonised lands subconsciously carry a strong tendency to bear the imprint of subjugated hierarchies? Indian histories are replete with such examples. To quote Cousins again as he gives the response to the question posed, 'India too has moved; but while Europe has moved away from her history, India has carried her history with her, not in books but in her thought and her blood' (Cousins J. H., 1918, pp. 10-11). Panikkar's probe, 'whether it is appropriate or even necessary to describe the Indian intellectual quest occurring under the debilitating colonial conditions as a 'renaissance' is therefore a valid question' (Panikkar, 2007, p. 133). In the words of Aurobindo:

Indian civilisation must be judged mainly by the culture and greatness of its millenniums, not by the ignorance and weakness of a few centuries. A culture must be judged, first by its essential spirit, then by its best accomplishment and, lastly, by its power of survival, renovation and adaptation to new phases of the permanent needs of the race. (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 120)

Sri Aurobindo envisioned a unique Indian Resurgence with three key stages. First; rediscovering India's glorious spiritual heritage in its entirety. Second; discovering new forms of expressions and not simply copying the past. He believed that this rediscovered spirituality would inspire new creative expressions in all aspects of Indian life – philosophy, art, literature, and even science. And finally; applying this revitalized Indian spirit to address modern problems or a 'Modernity with an Indian Spirit.' He describes the brilliance of India's past in the fields of "mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, surgery" and "physical knowledge", which according to him were proficiently practised in the ancient times. He mentions two most "striking examples" which stand out amongst a multitude – "the decimal notation in mathematics" and the insight of the Indian astronomers many centuries before Galileo, that the "earth is a moving body" or *cala prithvi sthira bhati* which means that the earth is a moving body but only appears to be static (Aurobindo, 1997, pp. 123-24). In India, the 1820s and 1830s have been referred to as the time of the

‘Bengal Renaissance’. This phase saw important achievements in different fields of literature, arts, social and religious reforms that steered a fresh awakening amongst the English educated middle classes. However, overarching colonial constraints also saw an increase of communalism, a project that the British cultivated specially after the rebellion of 1857. Thus, Renaissance in India requires to be seen as a compound of revival and reformation that did cause friction and unease in the social frame of the nation that can well be described as the *predicament of a colonial subjugation*.

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## On the Move: An Autoethnography of Uneven Mobility

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*‘Kaise jayegi?’* (How will you go?) ; *‘Kab aayegi?’* (When will you return?); *‘Pohuch kar message kar diyo.’* (message me when you reach); *‘raasta to safe hai na?’* (is the way safe?); *‘Andhera hone se pehle vapas aa jaiyo’* (come back home before it gets dark); *‘phone on rakhio aur jab phone karun to utha liyo’* (keep your phone switched-on and take my call when I call you). I was often addressed to these concerning statements and question by my mother whenever I left home.

The paper is a narration of Autoethnography of my experiences of mobility, immobility and the assumption of role of caretaker of mobility. Autoethnography involves a self-conscious exploration characterized by introspection, cultural description, and ethnographic explanation (Chang, 2008). Unlike traditional autobiography, which focuses solely on personal dynamics, autoethnography delves deeper into the cultural dynamics encountered by individuals (Ettore, 2017). This distinction is crucial, as it allows for the exploration of how personal experiences intersect with broader cultural narratives.

One of the key distinctions of autoethnography is its emphasis on ‘connecting the personal to the cultural’ (Chang 2008, 46). This resonates with Mills' concept of the sociological imagination, which underscores the importance of distinguishing between personal troubles and public issues within social structures (Mills 1959, 8). By contextualizing personal experiences within larger societal frameworks, autoethnography offers a nuanced understanding of personal experiences. Through this autoethnography I make sense of my personal experience of mobility and immobility and transition from being primarily mobile to assuming the role of ‘caretaker of mobility’ (Jensen 2020). The ‘sociological imagination’ (Mills, 1959) that I had acquired through my academic journey helped me to ‘move away from “unreflective common sense” (Beittle 2002, 22) and make sense of my personal experience. It made possible for me to ‘break free from immediacy of personal circumstances and put it into a wider context’ (Giddens 2010, 6).

The autoethnographic narrative is placed against the theoretical backdrop of Mimi Sheller and John Urry's New Mobilities Paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2005) which highlights that although there have been technological advancements in the area of mobility it is noted that the world is not more mobile than ever. People have differential mobility capabilities and uneven mobility experiences (Sheller and Urry, 2005). 'The unevenness of mobility may take the form of uneven *qualities* of experience' (Sheller 2017, 23). Source of these could be gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and physical abilities (Sheller 2017, 24). Women, for instance, are more likely to develop greater body consciousness and greater awareness of themselves as embodied than men whose identity is less situated in the body" (Entwistle 2015).

For "the problem of mobility injustice begins with one's body, that is, some bodies have greater ease, comfort, safety, less friction, noise, speed and so on (Sheller 2017). Through this autoethnographic narrative of differential mobile experience, the source of which is my body. Merleau Ponty places body at the centre of his analysis and emphasizes that our perception of the world comes from the place of our body in the World; the self is located in the body and the body is located in time and space and is not a passive object but a perceptually aware body as it moves through the space (Entwistle 2015). Furthermore, the body that moves through space is a gendered body that experiences time and space differently (Secor 2010 cited in Entwistle 2015).

I began commuting alone everyday in the year 2012 when I started my graduation and travelled everyday alone to go to my college. Before this, my movement was restricted to nearby tuition classes and occasional outings with my friends where I would commute with my friends to some mall or some market. I began using the Delhi Metro<sup>1</sup> regularly to commute to my college located in University of Delhi's South campus. It was the month of July of 2012 when I took my first alone ride in metro. I fondly remember that I had butterflies in my belly as I walked towards the entry gate of the metro station, I was excited and anxious about commuting all alone for the first time. During the initial years, many concerned relatives would ask my mother that how I commute everyday to a completely different part of the city and my mother would respond "*metro se... metro to safe hai*" (By metro... Metro is safe). My mother would time and again express to me, "*ye to metro hai to main tujhe itni door bhej rahi hoon, warna mere liye itni door akele bhejna tujhe kitna mushkil ho jaata* (It is because of metro that I am sending to that far... otherwise it would have been so difficult for me to send you that far)". Metro has been described in common opinion and academia to be a safe public transport, especially for women. But my mother's anxiety which was communicated to me through the list of statements and questions that I

was addressed to before every departure and the surprising reactions that I would get from relatives on knowing that I commute to south campus every day, instilled the 'spatial anxiety' (Alturi 2016, 219) in me that I have to be extra careful when I commute.

The seemingly ordinary movement between two points, GTB Nagar metro station and Race Course Metro station (now called as Lok Kalyan Marg metro station) and the auto ride between Race course metro station and my college was full of experiences, some pleasant, some unpleasant and some mundane. I experienced that 'travel is not just a question of getting to the destination' (Baerenholdt, 2004 cited in Sheller and Urry 2005, 214).

Metro became a stapled part of my every day. Till today I use Delhi Metro almost every day. I experienced how metro commute was not time wasted but it was a time that I could put to productive use (Rink 2016; Cidell 2020). On some days I would use the time to make some notes for a due assignment or to prepare for an upcoming exam; on other days I would take a quick nap on the commute or I would simply scroll through my phone. It was only later, during my master's programme that I began looking at and experiencing the space from a sociological perspective. Few years later when I got married, metro commute was the time when I would catch-up with my mother on a phone call.

Since my formative years, a fundamental lesson embedded in my mother's life mantra resonates within me, "*Ghar se bahar nikalne se chaar cheezein pata lagti hain, ghar par baithne se sirf dimag band hota hai*" (Translation: If you go out of the house, you get to know things; if you keep sitting at home, your brain stops working). This core principle has been a guiding force, underscoring the importance of being mobile and that leads to venturing beyond the familiar. As my academic journey unfolded, the echoes of this wisdom resounded when I encountered concepts like motility (Kaufman and Audikana 2020), mobility as capital<sup>2</sup>, differential mobility (Sheller and Urry 2005), kinetic elite (Cresswell 2006), mobile poor (Cresswell 2010), caretakers of mobility (Jensen 2020) and new mobilities paradigm<sup>3</sup> (Sheller and Urry 2005). Academic discourse not only mirrored but also reinforced the significance of the insights my mother had shared throughout my formative years.

In particular, this understanding informed my doctoral research, enabling me to delve deeper into the complex interplay of mobility within the context of the Delhi Metro. It allowed me to explore how factors like economic status, access, identity and safety contribute to the differential experiences of commuters within the metro space. The understanding of these concepts also helped me reflect on my personal mobility and immobility experience.

However, even as my mother emphasized the importance of mobility, her concerns about my whereabouts while I was on the move, my mode of transport revealed an underlying anxiety. Such concerns were not expressed for my brother's movement. She would find solace in my choice of the metro, deeming it a 'safe' space due to its enclosed nature, surveillance cameras, and the presence of fellow commuters.

So, amidst the celebration of mobility, a realization emerged. It became apparent that the experience of mobility is not uniform; it is uneven<sup>4</sup>, and it is differential. Through my experience I came to understand that the experience of mobility is differential for men and women. I would often experience uncomfortable stares while walking on the road or while commuting in the general coach of Delhi metro. However, the unpleasant experiences were not limited to uncomfortable stares but also included unwanted inappropriate touching. On a particular day, during the morning rush hour, I distinctly felt the man standing next to me touching me. Initially, I brushed it off, attributing it to the cramped conditions and assuming it was accidental. However, the touches persisted, prompting me to lean towards my friend to confide in him about it. Strangely, the man responsible hastily de-boarded the train at the next station. Nevertheless, this encounter only heightened my spatial anxiety, compelling me restrict myself to the private confines of the ladies' coach for my subsequent commutes, especially during rush hours.

Alongside personal experience, I was also exposed to academic writings that reflected my personal experience. This understanding, rooted in personal experience and academic reflections, later became a pivotal lens through which I began to approach my doctoral research. A part of my doctoral research focused my work to understand how experience of mobility and being in public space can result in differential experiences and not a uniform experience (Sheller and Urry 2005). Another important understanding that I acquired through the academic



journey was that mobility is not merely a physical act but a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by various factors, influencing not only the ability to move but also the quality or the experience of movement.

The first cart in the moving direction of the train is reserved for women passengers only, therefore, the first coach is popularly called as ladies coach or women's coach. During my initial years of commute and even today, I would prefer commuting in women's only coach as it felt a safe private space. Especially, on the days when I was wearing skirts or shorts I would especially ensure to commute in women's only coach taking a spot on the farthest corner of the women's only coach. On other days I would take any free spot available to sit or stand in the women's coach. On one particular morning I was commuting to my college and my partner was commuting with me as we were going in the same direction that day. I was standing next to him on the junction spot between the women's coach and the general coach. I was the morning rush hour and the metro was crowded. As a few stations passed, an elderly woman entered the coach and walked past the crowd to stand on a spot next to us. The woman seemed agitated, probably because of the crowded metro. After a few agitated statement to others about them not giving her enough space, she said, while looking at me, '*humare zamane me to ladkiya ghar se bahar bhi nahi nikalti thi, kisi se nazrein bhi nahi milati thi, aaj dekho ladko ko saath khadi hain, besharam.*' (In our times, girls would not even go out of the house, they won't make eye-contact with anyone, and but today see they are standing next to boys, shameless!).

On the days when I was running late, I would get into the arriving metro if I had not reached the designated spot for ladies coach on the platform and get into the metro from any gate of the general coach and walk towards the ladies coach. On a particular morning, I entered the coach next to women's coach as I was walking towards the ladies coach a man was standing in my way and I requested him to move aside and to that he responded, '*yahan se kyu ghus rahe ho apne coach se ghuso*' (why are you entering the metro from this coach, enter from your own coach). I was agitated by his statement and responded to him by reminding that the general coach is, in fact, general coach and not men's coach. On the next few commutes, I purposely got into the general coach as a protest to reclaim the general coach.

The year 2020 marked a pivotal moment as I entered the third year of my Ph.D. alongside embracing the responsibilities of marriage. This transition ushered in a shift from being primarily a mobile person to adopting

the role of a caretaker of mobility. With a self-paced work of nature assumed to be flexible, any crisis at home tethered me, forcing me to stay back while others continued with their mobile schedules. My role as a caretaker of mobility involved synchronizing my schedule with the mobility routines of other family members and prioritizing their mobility schedules, particularly the male members dictating the schedule of the household.

I would perform dual role of 'caretaker of mobility' (Jensen 2020) and being a mobile person myself. Hannah Loussie Jensen (2020) describes caretaker of mobility as 'the group of helpers that take care of commuters' home-based everyday duties, such as taking children to and from daycare, doing grocery shopping, cooking and so forth' (Jensen 2020, 138). Since the caretakers of mobility are doing these activities, it enables the mobile person without having to worry home-based duties that involve about preparation of other's mobility or their own mobility.

Every morning, before leaving the house I would perform the household duties. 'For women, accessing public space is rarely a simple question of get up and leave' (Phadke, Ranade 2011, 13). I would take care of my mobility, others' mobility and then I would assume the role of being a mobile person. On days when I would leave early, I would attempt to over compensate for the missed working hours in the morning or I would spend the rest of the day in guilt. This meant that I was exhausted by the end of the day.

Further, each departure from home required informing the eldest family member, even if my husband was already aware, rendering me perpetually answerable for my movements.

Further, I was solely dependent on the non-net fellowship<sup>5</sup> for financial support, which was about eight thousand rupees a month and not regular. The closest metro station to my marital home was about three kilometers away. This required taking an auto-rickshaw to and fro from the metro station. This would incur an additional cost of about hundred rupees per day over and above the cost of metro ride. This meant that I had to spend about four thousand rupees only on commute, which was fifty percent of what I was getting each month. Travel cost also played a role in making my mobility uneasy. It took me a few months when I figured out e-rickshaw routes that made the last mile connectivity a little less expensive for me. However this involved would involve waiting for other passengers and a long tiresome walk from the drop point of e-rickshaw to home. This

would mean that additional half hour was spent on commute. I would be worried about reaching on time since I was supposed to reach back home and assume the household duties.

A few years later when started working and earning; the first thing that I bought from my first pay was an electric chopper. Among other things, I was responsible for chopping vegetables for the *tadka* everyday. I bought this to compensate for the labour and time I was not able to give towards the household chores because of work commitments.

Furthermore, my decision to not display traditional symbols of marriage led to assumptions of my unmarried status in public spaces. When I started going to Sahitya Kala Akademi<sup>6</sup>'s library to work on my thesis, disclosing my marital status often elicited surprised responses from others expressing approval for my in-laws for 'permitting' my daily outings. Such incidents, including conversations with acquaintances, underscored patriarchal expectations of a married woman assuming the role of a care-taker of mobility. These notions were implicit in the interactions, hinting that my ability to venture beyond the domestic sphere was a concession granted by my marital family. An acquaintance once commented "*bahut acche hai na aapke in-laws, aapko aane dete hain, kisi tarah ki koi rok tok nahi hai*" (Your in-laws are very nice, they are letting you come (here) freely); she then continued enquiring about things like who is taking care of the house, who cooks at home and who maintains the house. I was never addressed such statements or questions before I got married.

On another occasion, a friend called me up once and during that conversation I told her that I had started going to the library to work on my thesis, she commented, "*tab to aapne apna bada accha schedule bana rakha hai ghar se bahar nikalne ka*" (you have made a great schedule of coming out of the house everyday). Echoing the similar notion and expectations.

This illustrates the interplay between mobility of women and the public-private dichotomy. 'The presence of women in public spaces is seen as transgressive and fraught with anxiety' (Phadke, Ranade 2011, 77). Thornton (1991) highlighted that the dichotomy between public and private spheres persists. The division of public and private sphere ensures that the changes in gender relations often do not threaten the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, which remain the primary site of inequality for women (Thornton 1991, 448). Ortnor

suggests, societal values continue to assign lower status to women's activities and roles associated with domestic life, perpetuating the symbolic association of women with nature and lower order existence (Pateman 1989, 124). Hence, even when I am a primarily mobile person, I still remain responsible for the domestic chores of the private sphere.

Two months after I got married, Delhi experienced a series of lockdowns lasting for span of fifteen months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This period induced anxiety as I felt a sense of detachment from my research work, losing both time and mobility. I found myself entirely under the surveillance of my in-laws, dependent on either my husband or brother for movement between my marital and natal homes only.

## Conclusion

Engaging with the concepts for the research related to differential mobility such as kinetic elite, mobile poor and mobility as a capital enabled me to reflect on my own personal experience in relation to mobility. Academic explorations helped me to reflect on my experience of transitioning from a mobile individual to a caretaker of mobility; the exploration of these concepts along with the echoes of my mother's life mantra but they also contributed to heightened anxiety of being left behind as immobile and being anchored within the private sphere.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The Delhi Metro is Delhi's major mass public transit system. Delhi Metro was proposed in 1984 as an attempt to decongest the roads of Delhi and as a solution to soared pollution levels. With the increasing number of commuters in Delhi there was increasing load on Bus system that it was unable to take and increasing number of commuters that were taking private vehicles. Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) was set up in 1989 and Metro rail system has been functional since 2002. This was a part of the project of world-class city making in Delhi during the preparation to host the mega-event Commonwealth Games in 2010. Delhi Metro was a part of the project of marking the arrival of Delhi in the race of World class cities.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of Motility articulated by Kaufman and Audikana (Kaufman and Audikna, 2020) is a crucial concept. The concept goes further beyond the traditional understanding of mobility are merely physical movement and expands the understanding of the concept. It highlights the importance of ability of being mobile by arguing that the capacity to be mobile is a capital in itself; which influences social integration and activates and attracts other forms of capital (Kaufman and Audikana, 2020). Motility includes social conditions of access, the knowledge and skills required to use the offer and mobility aspirations (Kaufman and Audikana 2020 :41).

<sup>3</sup> The New Mobilities Paradigm, conceived by Sheller and Urry, redirects attention towards understanding the complexities of mobility (Sheller and Urry, 2005). This paradigm challenges conventional social science perspectives, which had been fixate on static concepts, urging scholars to explore the multifaceted nature of mobility in the contemporary society. They emphasize that the focus of social science has been on static. It is noted that the mobility has been enhanced due to technological advancements; but the world is not more mobile than ever. Within this paradigm, key notions such as differential mobility, kinetic elite, and mobility poor come to the forefront, shedding light on the uneven distribution of mobility resources across different segments of society (Sheller, 2020; Cresswell, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Uneven mobility refers to differential mobility capabilities. Uneven mobility also refers to means or modes of movement that have a greater or lesser degree of ease, comfort, flexibility and safety with more or less friction noise, speed or turbulence. Uneven mobilities empower 'kinetic elite' (Cresswell, 2006) with speed, access and ease of movement while leaving behind the others as the 'mobility poor' (Cresswell 2006). And therefore creates these categories of kinetic elite and mobility poor.

<sup>5</sup>University Grants Commision's scheme of the Non-NET fellowship is applicable for M.Phil. and Ph.D. students who are not in receipt of any financial assistance from any source and are registered in various Departments/School/centers of the University. M.Phil students not availing any financial assistance from any other source are awarded Rs.5000/- per month as non-net fellowship with contingency of Rs.10,000/- per annum for Science subjects and Rs.8000/- per annum for Humanities and Social Science subjects. Ph.D.

students not availing any financial assistance from any other source are awarded of Non-NET fellowship of Rs.8000/- per month with contingency of Rs.10,000/- per annum for Science subjects and Rs.8000/- per annum for Humanities and Social Science subjects.

<sup>6</sup> The Sahitya Akademi is India's National Academy of Letters which is an organisation initiated to promote literature in various Indian languages. Its office is located in Rabindra Bhavan near Mandi House in Delhi. The Sahitya Akademi Library is a multi-lingual libraries in India which holds collection of books on literature and other allied subjects.

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## Massification of Art in Modern Times

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### Abstract

*The inherent nature of any form of art lies in its innate or organic ability to reproduce itself. Testimonies from history reveal how replicas of art helped in wider diffusion of the craft at different periods in time. However, in the modern era, reproduction/replicability of art has taken a different turn, a new direction in the way it is understood, perceived and practiced. However, the concern emerges from the perturbed relationship art shares with technology and the tension impacting the reproducibility of art in the modern times. The paper therefore aims to critically understand the role of mechanical-technological reproduction in shaping art, its aesthetics and representation in the modern era.*

**Key Words:** Massification, Mechanical-Technological Reproduction, Art, Modernity

### Contextualising the Theme

The inherent nature of any art form lies in its innate or organic ability to reproduce itself. Testimonies from history reveal how replicas of art have helped in diffusion of the craft at different junctures in time. However, in the modern era, reproduction/replicability of art has taken a different turn, a new direction in the way it is understood, perceived and practiced (Benjamin, 1968). However, the concern emerges from the perturbed relationship art shares with technology and the tension impacting the replicability of art in the modern times. Affirming the paradigmatic shift in the representation of art, Paul Valery said,

*“our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability*



*and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power.... we must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art” (Valery in Benjamin, 1968: 217).*

The paper therefore aims to critically understand the role mechanical- technological reproduction is playing in shaping art, its aesthetics and representation. The ideas are laid out in two different sections of the paper. Section one discusses the paradigm shift in art with the rise of technology driven mass reproduction. The second section reflects on the perturbed relationship art shares with technology and also confers on the hopes and possibilities that can emerge from the relation so that art is able to find new vistas in technology.

### **The Paradigmatic Shift in Art**

In the pre-modern times, the uniqueness and value of art laid in the inseparable existence from its tradition and historicity that found expression in its cult practices (Benjamin, 1968). Rise and growth of civilisations have witnessed replication of art at different points of time in history. However, the enlightened spirit of modernity came with the transcendence from past and a departure from what existed before. Questioning the legitimacy of the most established knowledge and practices, modernity emerged with the promise that advocated freedom, progress and change resulting in a paradigm shift in human thinking and practices (Dalal, Anand & Das, 2019). “The hegemony of scientific knowledge in the modern times had precisely the aim to define a domain of knowledge providing a logic of its own that disassociates it from its history and freezing large parts of the historical processes as well” (Feyerabend, 1993 in Ghadikolaei and Sajjadi, 2015: 2483). The world of art was not spared either from this bearing effect of modernity that is grounded in scientific practice, reason and technology.

With the shift towards mechanical-technological reproduction of art and the monopolisation of technology in the modern era, the customary cult practices degenerated. Modernity fostered what is called massification i.e mass reproduction that detached art from its illusive quality, originality, its unique singularity, aesthetic authority and authenticity that determined its 'aura' which lied in its transcendent beauty and power rooted in the fabric of tradition that produced the sacrality of the ritual (practice of art). It is this sacredness or sanctity of the practice that distinguished original works of art from its mechanically produced mass replicas.

However, with the disappearance of the rituals in the shift towards massification, art experienced what can be called the withering away of its auratic essence that broke the fidelity between art and its creator/the artist. Modern art's emphasis on autonomy from its tradition and rituals to advocate its practical function that stands on the values of utilitarianism and instrumentalism augmented mass reproduction of art. However, in the garb of autonomy, art became further more regulated and controlled with the technological interventions in its reproducibility. This took away what Kant said the 'free beauty' (Danto, 2013: 117) from art. Mass replication, repeatability, stripped off the aesthetic, cultural and political dimensions of art from its knowledge and practice (Benjamin, 1968). The reproducibility process infact isolated forms of art from its own meanings. Meanings infact become palpably transmittable and are reduced to mere information of a sort that has the potentiality to be overlooked and discounted. Art reduced to information holds no authority within itself as it can be subjected to modification or can be completed altered (Berger, 1972). Consequently, "works of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless and free" (Berger, 1972: 32) with its commodification that completely vanished the aura rooted in its authenticity and origin.

French philosopher, Jacques Ranciere believed that a significant reason behind this shift, is because "in the modern age, art has created its own autonomous milieu. Today we live in a world where art is a separate realm preoccupied with the division of the perceptible but separate from any judgement about the use to which it is put" (Ranciere in Ross, 2009 :1-3) What Ranciere hinted at is the disjuncture of aesthetics from its politics in the technological reproduction of art in the modern era. Nonetheless, according to another French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler (2007), what

Ranciere fails to capture is that, “aesthetics that is, sensibility and feeling, has become the very means by which every aspect of life is calculated and controlled, through the invention of aesthetic and affective technologies configured toward synchronising experience” (Stiegler, 2007: 335). The consequence is that, desire has become counter- productive to the extent that it destroys desire itself and subsequently the politics (Stiegler, 2007).

With this castration of desire from politics, visual attributes of art today are governed through certain aesthetic modalities that partitioned virtual from the real. It is the disengagement from its own reality/originality, presence, temporality, authenticity that has short circuited and mutated art forms in the modern times, something that gets revealed in its technological reproduction. Such condition Stiegler believed thrived on a “drive based state as there is a regression of desire to drive which he called, the symbolic misery” (Stiegler in Ross 2009: 4), that art experiences in its massification. Stielger interprets this existing condition of art initially as ‘tendential loss of *savoir-faire*’ (Ibid: 16) and later characterized it as generalised proletarianization i.e “loss in the capacity to develop knowledge or where production of knowledge is reduced to sheer consumption” (Stiegler, 2013 in Das, 2022: 44). With the loss in thinking and creativity, art is left to be systematically manipulated, transformed and analysed which according to Stiegler happened to “appeal to the susceptibility of the noetic psyche, by luring the psyche with and into sensationalism to gratify the drive based short term/immediate satisfaction of the audiences rather than cultivating/nurturing the singular/long term desires” (Stiegler in Ross 2009: 15-17). Thus, in this psychotic nature of mass reproduction, what is revealed is the disconnection of art from its reality, destruction of desire and its regression to drive based psyche and the collapse of the symbolic realm with the departure of aesthetics from politics, as per Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In the modern era, massification of art is governed by the rule of aesthetics. “In the rule of aesthetics social order is maintained through public mode of viewership, reasoned injunctions, systems of belief or statutory command” (Ghertner, 2015 :6). Unlike the pre-modern art forms, there is conspicuous absence of techniques and procedures that is disconnected from its rituals/politics of practice, traditions and history. Art losing its authority in the break away from its own politics of practice as evident in its massification has led to what can be called

aestheticisation of art that paradoxically de-aestheticised art in the randomness and arbitrariness of the rule or modalities. Mass reproducibility of art has therefore become delusionary in nature with sensory knowledge reaching its saturation i.e virtual and the real touching the point of indistinction. This disengagement of the virtual from the real can be appropriately explained when Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek said, “as soon as we renounce fiction and illusion, we lose reality itself; the moment we subtract fictions from reality, reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency” (Žižek, 1993: 88). It is this separation of the virtual from its reality/origin that corrupts the auratic legitimacy of art. In such a condition, art is subjected to exploitation in its instrumental appropriation to cater to the modern times and its primacies.

Therefore, while in the pre-modern era, art was able to sustain its origin in form and state and was able to determine a certain uniqueness of its existence and history, in the modern times, with mass reproduction/massification, art got disengaged from its origin, existence and antiquity. Benjamin acknowledged that, “in even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art — its unique existence in a particular place” (Benjamin, 1936: 21). With technological reproduction of art taking over, forms of art can now be maneuvered for different spectators at different times depicting different meanings and implications. A piece of art work created in a particular milieu of tradition, ritual, emotion, culture, politics and point in history may represent an entirely different perspective in its technological reproducibility/mass replicability at diverse junctures of space and time. Massification, that emerged with the intention to gratify the aesthetic pleasure of the sheer tangibility of art to its audience who are detached spectators unwilling to participate in the rituals of the art form they perceived, took away the aura of authority from art (Benjamin, 1968). With the collapse of the aura or the ‘diminishing of the sublime’ in the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant’s words, art lost the sensibilities of extraordinariness and rarity. However, John Berger observed that it is not a question of mass reproduction failing to anchor art in ways that it does not lose its auratic essence. The right question that we need ask is that how mass reproduction of art was able to legitimise the devaluing of its authenticity to ensure its productive usage in the modern times (Berger, 1972).

### **Rethinking the Connection Between Art and Technology**

The previous section discussed the emerging concerns on the instrumentality of mechanical reproduction of art in the modern times and the angst, unease around art's technology regulated replicability. The present section, recognising and understanding the perturbed relationship art shares with technology, attempts to find hopes and possibilities that can emerge transcending the anxieties and apprehensions so that art can reach new heights in technology. Some of the questions therefore that arises in this context are: can we explore the potentiality between art and technology to 're-aestheticize' what has been 'de-aestheticized' in art? Can new capacities emerge from the process of mass replication? How can we politicize back the aesthetic or to be more specific how do we politicise back the sensible in the aesthetics to revive the value of aura in art?

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that technological reproduction has emancipated works of art from what Benjamin said, 'its parasitical dependence of singularity of ritual' (Benjamin, 1968: 224). With the decay of the aura, art forms were salvaged from its minority condition. Massification paved the way and made art tangible and accessible to the spectator. It is this desire of modernity to overcome the impalpable reality that led to the emergence of one of the most revolutionary forms of reproduction i.e photography that replaced the aura of fine arts. Infact it is in photography, a modern art form where mechanical-technological reproduction became most visible (Benjamin, 1968).

What was radical about the process of replication in photography was that it was able to capture the reality through the use of technology (lens) that natural vision could not capture. This technique of reproduction placed the replicas of the original into conditions which is beyond the reach of the original itself and mostly importantly technological reproduction enabled the original to meet the audience halfway, in form of replicas (Benjamin, 1968). However, the general willingness to replace reproduced forms with the original art work, implied the unwillingness of the masses to engage with the original and the singularity of its ritual and politics. (Benjamin, 1968). With the replication of multiple images, the authentic aura is lost. This technique of reproduction disconnected the reproduced form from its origin/tradition. However, interestingly, "reproduction created a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And further, in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivated the object reproduced"

(Ibid: 221). Hence, according to Valery, in its reproducibility that, “works of art will acquire a kind of ubiquity where art will cease to be anything more than a kind of source or point of origin whose benefit will be available and quite fully so, wherever we wish. Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign” (Valery in Benjamin, 1968: 217-219).

Further, this shift towards technological reproduction, drastically transformed the response or rather engagement of the audience with art. According to Benjamin (1968), “mechanical reproduction of art changed the reaction of the masses in way they experienced art. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert” (Benjamin, 1968: 234). This has the potentiality of sustaining the symbolic order which has otherwise collapsed for those anxious about the mass replicability of art. Sanil (2003) too stated that “the work of art is not an external object we encounter contingently. The work of art is structured by the encounter between the beholder and the work. The meaning of a work is not something which exists prior to all encounters with it or something which the reader imposes on it. The meaning of the work happens through a structure which emerges from the events of encounters between the reader and the work” (Sanil, 2003: 3658). Such an engagement between art and its audience is of great social significance, something that got missed out in the uncritical aesthetic perceptivity of the spectators in the pre-modern era. A crucial reason being, the subjectivity of the beholders never found legitimacy in the auratic authority of art and also because of the hegemony of the creator/artist who upheld the empirical uniqueness of her/his creation (Benjamin, 1968). The consequence is that, it created an abyss between what is thought and what is displayed by the artist that also ripped off from the creation its supposed reality.

Mechanical-technological reproduction thus liberated the practice of art from solely the one who is creating it i.e its private realm and brought it into the public domain that increased the social significance of art. Importance of exhibiting works of art came with the intend to create a shared space for a rational discourse between diverse spectators and the artists where free communication can emerge possibilities for inter-subjective interpretations based on mutual reciprocity and an ethos of understanding which German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas calls ‘communicative

rationality'. "Visibility itself is underwritten by certain legitimating narratives that prevent the spectators from seeing, blinding and eclipsing from their view that which might later come to be seen as quite obviously unjust, exclusionary, unequal" (Sanil and Dwivedi, 2019: 298). Hence crucial is to bring art in the public domain to "question the ways of seeing and interrogate the supposed legitimate narratives that which passes as sanctioned as publicly accepted mythologies that have established themselves as truths, or as just the way things are" (Ibid: 298). In this way, public sphere can be a mark of progress according to Kant as by re-aesthetising art i.e bringing back the politics in the aesthetic sensibility, possibilities can be created that can open up new contact zones between the artists and the viewers, bringing vocality in visibility and further unlocking the potentialities of participation and action in the field of art (Sanil and Dwivedi, 2019, 142-150). Much of the modern art might have lost its auratic aesthetics, but what comprises its essence is the power of meaning and the possibility of truth that emerges in the interpretation of the spectators which brings meanings and truths into play when perceived in the public sphere (Danto, 2013).

However, for "Hegel as opposed to Habermasian and Kantian thought, public sphere can be conflicting or rather antagonistic in nature (Sanil and Dwivedi, 2019: 4). "With the collapse of the civil society, public sphere became redundant. This fragmentation or rather the redundancy of the public sphere can weave art and its representations unselfconsciously into the fabric of such collectives that has the ability to degenerate the vision of the spectators causing a suspension of the intellect and worse in the way they perceive art" (Ibid: 298). In such conditions there is a possibility that "the relationship art shares with technology is trivialized. Technology is seen as a mere application and its influence on art is demonised as something that destroys the meaning of art" (Sanil, 2003: 3659). This tension between art and technology creating distinctions between aesthetics grounded in beauty and pleasure and technology rooted in utility and instrumentalism (Sanil, 2003) should be therefore rethought.

Sanil (2003) further stated that, "inherent in art is the power of language that has the ability to transcend art from its origin/actual, empirical reality to a more textured dimension called the fictional reality" (Sanil, 2003: 3661) to "render art its purely aesthetic form and make it abstractive so that the perceiver (spectator) and the perceived (artist) achieve a state of self or world-forgetfulness as they enter the world of art" (Goehr, 2018: 1). However, "this fictional reality

despite its claim to transcend the reality is still rooted in the human condition and existence. This is the reason why despite its non-actuality; the productive outcome of the fictive consciousness satisfies the general constitutive conditions of human world” (Opcit: 3661). Contrastingly, mechanical-technological reproduction of art does not cater to the established conditions of human existence. Instead there is conscious break away from the established realities of the world. Massification grounds the existential reality of art in technological conditions. This radical transcendence of art through technology is unique as no other dimension is able to do that seemingly to achieve aesthetics in purity. However, what is important to understand is that this transcendence is virtual and not fictional in nature. Fictional/imaginary is not visual (Sanil, 2003). Once we understand this, only then we will be able to regard the unique capacity of technology in art. Relevant would be to quote the German-American philosopher, Hannah Arendt (1961) here as she said “a crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with profound judgements, that is, with prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides” (Arendt, 1961: 174). Hence, rather than being critical about the influence of technology on art, pertinent is to explore the potentiality of the relationship between art and technology. The need of the hour is to create counter publics that are not always dissentient or counter-hegemonic in nature. Rather, establish discourses that can stitch the divide between the secret (private) and the accessible (public) and facilitate an engagement between the creator/artist and the spectator/audience rather than isolating them from each other (Dwivedi & Sanil, 2019: 5-8).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In the modern times when technology is colonising humans and their lifeworlds, the realm of art is not spared from its influence. With the technology regulated mechanical reproduction that we call massification, not only the auratic status of art has suffered, even the audience/spectator has become a distracted critic lacking in political potential. Mechanical reproduction of art disconnects the masses from their potentiality to perceive art. Masses see art from a gaze controlled and regulated by technology that takes away the possibility of an interrogative engagement. However, the way out is not in resisting technological replicability of art. “Art must restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity’s self-preservation, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by passing through them” (Benjamin, 1964: 229-238). In the times where



technology is governing human condition, instead of negating the relationship, the aim should be to “seek un-deformed links between art and technology and explore non-manipulative and life-enhancing links within technology itself” (Sanil, 2003: 3660). Hence, transcending the anti-technological nostalgia one should explore new horizons by creating an enabling meeting ground between art and technology and find hopes and possibilities in the massification of art in the modern times.

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## **Redefining the Identity issues; Contestations; Autonomy Movement and Politics of Bodo people in Assam**

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### **Abstract**

*The Bodo movement due to the negligence and ignorance by Assam Government is a long-standing ethnic issue in Assam since 1966. The Bodos, known as first settlers in Brahmaputra valley demanding for separate state 'Udayachal' later 'Bodoland' by slogan divide Assam 50/50. As an outcome of prolong movement, the government of India came forward with the BAC (1993), BTC (2003) and BTR (2020) agreements but couldn't satisfy the Bodos aspirations for self-autonomy. The paper deals with the redefining of identity issues that resulted movements, contestations and politics of Bodos in Assam.*

### **Introduction**

The nationalists are born out of the feelings of the nationalism. Bodo Nationalists are born because of the realization about their historical past of their identity as a distinct nation. The Bodo movement is a consequence of the realization of their existence as a nation and race that had been threatened. The Bodo tribe were compelled to seek their own identity linguistically, ethnically, culturally and politically (Narzinary 2011, p. 01). The Bodoland movement under the purview of Indian Constitution, though the armed group NDFB were demanding independent country curving out from India. Whatever actions they had undertaken were to seek political sovereignty for their own nation. These can be called separate state or homeland within or over Indian territory.

The Bodos are ethnically Indo-Mongoloid, linguistically Tibeto-Burman family were inhabitants of South East-Asia and west China were migrated to Brahmaputra valley during 5000 BCE. Historically they are known as the Ashura, Kirata, Mlecha, Kacharis, now Bodos. The Borok, Deuri, Dimasa, Sonowal, Garo, Rabha, Thengal and Mech are the cognate tribes of same ancestry. They are little known by the outside world because of very less written history and documents. Presently the Bodos are residing in Brahmaputra valley of Assam, Mechi river valley of Nepal, North Bengal and Garo Hills (Dattaray 1989, p. 12).

The ancestors of Bodos earlier ruled entire Kamrupa kingdom known as Mlecha dynasty till their kingdom was conquered by the Pala dynasty. The loss of Kingdom resulted them to get divided into Kachari, Tipperah, Dimasa, Koch, Mech. During British era, the social deprivations, untouchability, negative impacts of assimilation, the critical rules of the develop community, losses of their ancestral lands and the issues of language made them to form a superstructure of various movements since 1966.

The Indian Government, now and then came forward for the solution of Bodo movement by BAC (1993), BTC (2003) and BTR (2020) agreements but couldn't satisfy the Bodos. This paper attempted to give insights of the identity issue, Bodo movement and present situations of identity politics in Bodo region.

### **Redefining the issues of identity crisis of Bodos**

After the arrival of Aryans in Assam, the sense of discrimination and practices of untouchability were somehow started and became prevalent in the region (Narzary 2011, p. 18). The Bodos and cognate tribes were regarded as untouchables by the higher castes. The higher caste never accepted them in their society was the most unsympathetic with their ideals and aspirations.

The participation of Bodos in India's freedom movement brought little consciousness among them about their self-identity and rights particularly in relation to Assamese people (Singh 2002, pp.90-93). Again, the Brahma Somaj preached by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in early 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced to reform the Bodo society. It was a self-revolution movement that witnessed a remarkable spread of socio-religious, educational and political awareness among the Bodos. The formation of Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani (1928) was also played a crucial role to integrate with the various cognate tribes of greater 'Kachari' community scattered all over Assam for the efforts to ameliorate their society and emancipate it from the bondage of illiteracy and social backwardness. Despite their understanding about the relevant of Education, the poverty and lack of consciousness remain as obstacles among the tribal people. In these prevailing situations, under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma, they submitted memorandum to Simon Commission in 1929 (Times of India 2016, p. 01). In the memorandum, they demanded reservation and separate representation for plain tribals in Assam and one reserved seat in central legislature. Demanded free studentship and scholarship to Kachari students in schools-colleges according to their percentage in Assam to encourage their students. They

further asserted, the Kachari community do not recognize themselves as a lower class or untouchable. They are distinct from the Hindu community in all respect socially and religiously.

In the Government of India Act-1935 provisioned for four reserved seats in Assam provincial Assembly. Sri Rupnath Brahma, a prominent Bodo leader became a minister in Bordoloi Ministry in September, 1938. In 1946, Indian National Congress appoints Mr. Dharanidhar Basumatary as a member in Constituent Assembly. But the Assamese people were not about to accept and tolerate for coming possible political adversary from Tribals. There was an apprehension of political leadership may grow among the tribals because of their numerical strengths in Assam. So, Charan Narzary said, *'Right from the beginning they (Assamese) pursued an undeclared anti-tribal policy and had been working actively in a systematic manner to keep the tribals subdued and get them completely assimilated into the Assamese society by obliterating their distinctive ethnic identity.'*

The assimilation may not be harmful but not often beneficial for tribals. In Assam, the assimilation means conversion of a tribal into Assamese Hindu that negatively impacted of loss of identity. The assimilation and categorization of Hindunised Bodo as Assamese in census had reduced the Bodo population in the official record (Memorandum, 1929 p.01).

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee was formed by Constituent Assembly to study the issues in tribal in North-East Frontier (Assam) and Excluded Area. The Sub-committee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi was needed to suggest for necessary constitutional provision to be added in Indian Constitution. But the issues of the tribals of plain area of Assam were left out by this Sub-Committee to be dealt with. The tribals of plain area of Assam neither included in the Fifth nor in Sixth Scheduled area. Charan Narzary said, 'all this happened because of the biased attitude and deep heinous conspiracy by the Assamese leaders to deprive the tribals of plain area from their legitimate due. If they were included either in the Fifth or the Sixth Schedule, they would have undoubtedly enjoyed autonomy to protect their ethnic identity and lands.'

The land issue was also very serious. They had stories from their forefathers about abundant of lands. But they got to see lakh of landless tribals because of Government's failure to protect the tribal lands. The tribal lands are covered by the tribal belt and blocks as per the provisions given by the Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act-1886 amended in 1962. The state government notified plain tribes, hill tribes, tea-tribes, Santals as SC and Koch Rajbanshi of Goalpara as backward class and need to be protected because of their primitive

conditions, lack of education and incapability of development (Mahanta 2013, pp. 49-58). But ever since the enactment of this law, its provisions were never implemented. Due to rapid industrialization and urbanization, the tribals have lost their ancestral lands because of lack of land certificates. The Government neither absorb them in new economic set-up nor had taken any scheme for their rehabilitation to save them from crushing impact of urbanization and industrialization. The issues were raised by All Assam Kachari Association, Bodo Chatra Sanmilani and Kachari Jubok Sanmilani several times. Till now, Lakhs of Bodo people are residing in the forest reserve lands without land holding documents.

Again, by the Assam official Language Act-1960, the Assam Government tried to impose Assamese as compulsory official language in every official purpose of Assam. After that the English and Hindi can be used for the official purposes in secretarial and offices of the Assam Government offices (Assam official language Act-1960, p.03). This imposition by Assam government brought new tensions among the all the other communities including Bodos and Bengali.

The Bodo Thunlai Afad (Bodo Sahitya Sabha-BSS) was formed on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1952 to work for the upliftment of the Bodo literature and language since its inception. The Sabha not only protested against the act-1960, but also demanded for the establishment of Bodo medium in schools in Roman Script.

These issues with Assam Government, the Bodo and other tribal people believed that the Government had done enough harms to the tribals. Forced assimilation, infiltration of illegal migrants into the tribal lands and misrule by means of oppression were the reasons to destroy the Bodos and other indigenous tribal people of Assam.

In 1967, the Dularay Boro Phoraisa Afad (All Bodo Students Union-ABSU) and PTCA (Plains Tribal Council of Assam) were formed. The PTCA launched political movement and demanded '*separate state Udayachal*' for the plain tribals at the northern valley of Brahmaputra whereas the ABSU were working for the upliftment of the Bodo students. The PTCA campaigned to boycott the Lok Sabha election on 1968 particularly in Kokrajhar constituency. They submitted a memorandum by demanding '*Udayachal*' to the then Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi ji, President V.V. Giri ji and to the Home Ministry (Dash 1989, 335-342). This prolongs movement occurs till the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act-1971. This act was reorganizing the undivided Assam by establishing the Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya as separate states and the Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh as union territories. But the '*Udayachal*' demand didn't get enough importance. The PTCA leaders failed to pressure the Government,

instead, they particularly Bodo leaders supported and participated actively the anti-foreigner movement by All Assam Student's Union (AASU).

In 1985, the Assam accord was signed. As per the clause 6<sup>th</sup> of the Assam accord that provided for the preservation and development of only Assamese language and cultural identity. the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) by a notification, imposed Assamese as a compulsory language in schools in February 1986.

The tribal interests were bypassed by the clause 6<sup>th</sup> of the Assam accord. Some Bodo group started to believe that the PTCA leaders didn't pressurize the Government, they assumed that the PTCA leaders after holding selfish political positions; they already surrendered their dreams for separate homeland.

The Dularay Boro Phoraisa Afad and Bodo Thunlai Afad opposed Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, arguing that it might legitimize the imposition of Assamese language and culture on the Bodos (Nath 2003, pp. 533-545). The Bodo and other tribals incensed with this decision of Assam Government. It revoked the Bodo to feel that the chauvinist Assamese again tried to dominate the Bodo and Tribals.

The ABSU and BPAC (Bodo people Action Committee) re-launched fresh movement in a democratic manner to formed separate state Bodoland by curving out from Assam with the slogan 'Divide Assam 50/50' under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1987. Having bitter experience of negligence and repressive rule under the administration, the Bodo people have deep conviction in their heart that only the Bodoland will guarantee to preserve their identity. During that time, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was Chief Minister in Assam.

The Government responded the movement group by using forces through Assam police, army and other Para military. There was a mass gathering at Guwahati judge field on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1987, thousands of movement supporters were participated. After the program, while returning to home, some unidentified miscreants attacked the movement groups at Tihu in Nalbari District resulted a death of a Student Sujeet Narzary. Later, the ABSU movement transformed to violent tactics. The movement supporters started to attacked non-tribals, government officials including schools, markets, railways and bridges.

Similarly, the Boro Security Force (BrSF) later known as National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) was also founded under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary, Gobinda Basumatary, Dhirendra Boro on 03<sup>rd</sup> October, 1986 to fight for independent country 'Boroland'. It was an Armed group that started to conceive more militancy in the hearts of the

Bodo youth as a re-response to government's responses that gradually developed to full bloom. The rise of militancy resulted loss of human lives, human rights violation, threat to human security including fratricidal killings among the Bodos.

### **The Bodo Agreements**

After the sudden death of Upendranath Brahma on 01<sup>st</sup> May, 1990, Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary became ABSU President and lead the negotiations with the Governments. The BAC (Bodoland Autonomous Council) was signed by the movement leaders with the Assam and Central Government to end up the tremendous violence in the region on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993.

But the accord was never implemented properly. Because of the confusion and disagreements over the boundary, failure to provide rehabilitation to the surrendered insurgents and confusions of power and functions of the Council, the then CEM of BAC Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary rejected and resigned from the post.

The then Dularay Boro Phoraisa Afad (ABSU) President Mr. Swmbila Basumatary also denounced the BAC Accord and resubmits new memorandum to Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1996 to revive the movement for Bodoland.

The Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) for parallel armed struggle was also formed by the leadership of Bir Chilagang and Hagrama Basumatary for the movement of separate state on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1996. The armed struggle was gradually become in leading position but it brought ethnic clashes and killing of many people including women and children in the region.

The BLTF declared ceasefire in July 1999. During ceasefire, the Kargil war broke out between India and Pakistan. It was this anti-government militant group which spoke to patronage the Indian government by joining the Indian Army against the Pakistan which impresses the government officials during the negotiations held between the BLTF and the Indian Government making an impetus in the signing of Memorandum of Settlement.

The BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) agreement had been signed on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2003 between BLTF with the Central and State Government. BTC was established under the Sixth Schedule through the Sixth schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act-2003. The BTC is



comprising of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri district by total area of 8822 KM.<sup>2</sup> This BTC jurisdiction will be known as BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area District). The agreement brought new aspirations for the progress, prosperity and security to the Bodo people politically, socially, culturally and economically through self-governing capacity. The agreement recognized the Bodo language under the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Indian Constitution also.

### **The Politics of Identity and Contestation**

The BTC is conferred with legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers. It is constituted with 40 elected and 6 nominated members. 30 seats reserved for ST, 5 for non-ST and 5 for general. Total 40 different subjects were transferred to BTC authority. Funds shall be provided by the both State and central government. BTC itself has some revenue from transports, land, natural resources like forests (other than reserved forest), liquor shop tax, lotteries, town committee, sericulture etc. The funds from any sources can be utilized for the developmental works like constructions of road, bridges, hospitals, school buildings, appointments of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, subsidies to poor, establishment of research and development centres for the protections of tribal languages, lands, culture, traditions, customs etc. Since the agreement, Hagrama Mahilary became the Chief of BTC and later formed Bodoland People Front (BPF), a political party.

The NDFB, who were fighting for sovereign country were neutral during agreement, later they termed the agreement as an insult to the Bodo nation. They criticized the new accord has more provisions for the rights of the non-tribals than the tribal people. The agreement allowed land ownership rights to the people all category in the BTAD area. This is the against of the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 as amended in 1964 and 1974, which established tribal belt and blocks to ensure the tribal's exclusive rights over land within these areas in Assam. The BTC accord has legitimized the illegal migrants and the encroachers also to settle down permanently in the region and occupied the tribal's ancestral lands. If the tribals failed to handle absolute right over their ancestral land, the survival of the tribal community with their distinct identity and culture can never be possible. The increase in non-tribal population in Bodo area will marginalize the population structure of the indigenous people in their own land. Some Bodo intellectuals and Student leaders also believed that BTC accord has miserably failed to

reflect the aspirations of the Bodos because of the thousands of Boro people did not sacrifice and suffered for mere economic solution.

The absence Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) election has also developed ill-feeling and division between the Bodo and non-Bodo people. VCDC is the gram panchayat system under Bodoland Territorial council. The council government had been enjoyed such political opportunities simply by selecting or nominating by favoring the Bodos without the conduct of election procedure.

The non-Bodo people were opposing the formation of the BTC by arguing, the 70% of the non-Bodo population cannot be controlled by the 30% Bodo people. The 18 different non-Bodo organizations came together and formed the Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti (Nath 2003, p. 540). Gradually they earned supports from the non-Bodo people in the region and struggled to revoke BTC agreement. Some non-Bodo organizations even threatened to adopt violent means also. These waves of unity among the non-Bodo people brought the result in the Lok Sabha election that the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha Constituency (ST) got occupied by duplicate ST Naba Kumar Sarania for two consecutive terms from 2014 to 2024. Naba Sarania was a ULFA militant who was arrested on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2012 for robbery, murder and kidnap was in bail.

It was a great challenge of the BTC government and other Bodo organizations to earn confidence from the non-Bodo communities. The responsibility of the BTC government was to give their assurance of security to the non-Bodo people. The BTC was guaranteed the land rights and equal rights to the non-tribal people with tribals who were living in the region since before the accord. But the National Democratic front of Bodoland (NDFB) never agreed. This disagreement and political awareness among the non-Bodo brought more tension and insecurity. The political differences of Bodo and non-Bodo in the region brought chaos resulted several ethnic violence between Bodo and Muslim in 2012 and Bodo Santali conflict in 2014. The ABSU during the presidency of Promod Baro was restarted the Bodoland Movement from 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2010 with more strength and mass support. They claimed the dreams of the Bodos have not been fulfilled by the BTC because of it has less power and functions to protect the tribal interests. In addition, the ABSU always opposed the gun culture. They always invited the underground organization NDFB to declare cease fire and come to table talk with the

Government for peace and prosperity. The new generation Bodo leaders already familiar with the negative impact of the insurgency and counter insurgency in the region because of many innocent Bodo youth have been killed in fake encounter and got arrested by armed forces in the name of Bodo militant.

The NDFB factions declared ceasefire. The third accord Bodoland Territorial region (BTR) has been signed on 27<sup>th</sup> February of 2020 with ABSU and all faction of NDFB as the comprehensive and final solution of the demand of Bodo without further division of the Assam. The movement leaders claimed it as the best agreement ever that it will fulfill all the aspirations of the Bodo, the Deputy commissioner shall be under the jurisdiction of the Council Government, direct funding from the Centre, the area of the Council shall be expanded to Gohpur, the constituency shall be increased to 60, the Bodo of the outside BTR shall be given new statutory council, many more educational institutions will be established and more power and functions to be transferred to the council.

After the agreement, the council election was needed to be conducted. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the election was postponed and Governor Rule had been imposed on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2020.

We see, there is a huge impact of emotions and nationalism to earn vote from the Bodos in elections. The agreement gave new aspirations to the Bodos to attach emotionally with the movement leaders. The movement leaders together formed new party United People Party Liberal (UPPL). We could expect the new party would be gaining absolute majority in election. But due to the delay in election, the people of the region got chance to study the BTR agreement deeply. The insightful understanding of the agreement, dissatisfaction, disagreement and criticism by the of Bodo intellectual impacted in council election. The UPPL party only succeeded to occupy only 12 seats and failed to be in majority. Congress and o-Boro 1 seat each, BJP and BPF occupied 9 and 17 seats respectively. Later, the UPPL formed coalition government with BJP and other independent Candidates.

## **Conclusion**

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) established through the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (amendment) Act-2003 was very strong enough to secure its geographical

boundary. As per the paragraph 1 and its sub-paragraphs of Sixth Schedule, the Governor has power to include, exclude, increase, diminish or divide the Autonomous areas. It was not applicable to the Bodoland Territorial council (BTC) except by constitutional amendment as per footnotes added in Sixth schedule. But the 3.1(ii) clause of BTR added for the exclusion and inclusion of villages from BTC jurisdiction.

The BTR agreement has not been passed in parliament till writing of this paper. But some clauses possible by the state Government have been implemented instantly. The inclusion of the Bodo language as an associate official language in Assam, establishment of separate Directorate for Bodo medium and other Tribal languages, formation of Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council (BKWAC), transferred of responsibility of 16 departments of council to the deputy commissioner for monitoring and separate department in state Government to deal with Bodoland Territorial Council.

The third phase Bodo movement was giving ambitions to achieve the separate state Bodoland because of its huge mass supports. The instant BTR agreement seems to fulfill some leader's personal greedy to occupy political power only. So, Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, Daorao Dekreb Narzary, Hiracharan Narzinary and likeminded Bodo intellectuals started to criticize the agreement and threatened to revive the movement. They opposed the implementation by arguing, it is going to hamper and scrap the existing structure of the Bodoland Territorial Council-2003 in case of legislative, executive, administrative and financial. The transfer of 16 departments to Deputy Commissioner is a deep-rooted conspiracy of the state government to snatch away the autonomy from the BTC. The provision of the exclusion of the existing area will weaken the strong geographical boundary of the council. They file a petition to the High Court to review some clauses of the BTR agreement.

The reality of the new Bodo accord will be on the hand of the governments. All the Bodo people are happy with the homecoming of the National Democratic front of Boroland (NDFB) cadres. The clause 9.4 of the memorandum was promised that the criminal cases against the NDFB members shall be withdrawn by the government. Bodo intellectuals believed that it would be better if the agreement brought general amnesty for the all-militant cadre who surrendered and disband the organization along with. But this clause 9.4 has not been

implemented yet, some ex NDFB cadres still receives arrest warrants. So, these present situations don't show the end of the Bodo movement. The dissatisfaction of agreement, implementations and governance of present council government are loosening public supports day by day.

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## SDGs, Sustainable Development and the Environment: Problems and Solutions

Anu Satyal

### Abstract

*Developed countries have high SDG and HDI scores (taken as proxies for development and improved well-being) but are weak on goals related to the environment and climate action. Their per person Ecological Footprint (EF), International Spillovers and GHG emissions is high. Most of Asia and Africa has lower per capita share of ecological degradation. However, among the emerging economies, China and India have increased their aggregate Footprint though their per capita levels are low. This ecological deficit cannot be sustained and will lead to an inter-generational and inter and intra-spatial asymmetry in the distribution of costs and benefits of growth. The brunt of the adverse impact of environmental degradation is borne more by the poor and women in poorer countries. It is imperative to decouple, encourage circularity, curtail ecological degradation / depletion and mitigate the effects of COVID-19, conflict and climate change with effective policies, social protection, strict regulation and strong institutions. International policy coherence and cooperation in the sharing of funds, knowledge, technology and capacity building to make growth more inclusive and sustainable is most critical to address these issues.*

Key words: SDGs, HDI, Ecological Footprint, Spillovers, GHG emissions

### Introduction

Growth, inequity, poverty reduction, decent work, environmental degradation, governance, gender equality, COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, resilience, capacity building, global partnerships, funds and re-distribution are some of the key words frequently referred to in contemporary research and policy debates. UN SDGs (UN, 2015) form the context for a large part of work on labour markets, gender, poverty, hunger, education, health, climate change and development. The UN launched the SDGs with a commitment to *leave no one behind*. Economic development with inclusion and environmental viability comprises the three pillars of seventeen SDGs<sup>1</sup> with 169 targets tracked by data spread over more than 240 outcome and

implementation indicators, given by the Global Indicator Framework (GIF), to be achieved by 2030. SDGs are development goals aimed at elimination of hunger and poverty, provision of clean water, sanitation, energy, education, health and decent work with increased gender equality and development of sustainable cities with a judicious use of resources. They form the blueprint for all development policy in the current period. SDGs are a set of inter-connected, cross-cutting goals which are a non-binding, inter-governmental agreement.

However, the Sustainable Development Report (SDR) has declared that the SDGs are offtrack with only 18 percent of the SDG targets having been achieved by 2023 (SDR, 2023, 9, 24). With more than the half-way mark having passed to achieve the time-bound goals, inequalities between and within the developed and the developing countries persist, accentuated by climate change, conflict and COVID-19. The SDGs are constrained by insufficient global partnerships, finance and access to the right kind of data, disaggregated by sex and regions. Developed countries are expected to commit funds and provide technology for necessary transformations and build capacity in developing countries, fostered by global and local partnerships but these changes have been slow. Pursuit of SDGs have varied implications for the environment. This paper looks at the relation between SDG and HDI performance with environmental impact in terms of EF, GHG emissions and International Spillovers. The conclusion provides pointers for future research and discusses the main policy implications that follow from this analysis.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The SDGs are traced to the UN Conference on Human Environment' held in 1972 in Stockholm, followed by the Brundtland Commission Report (1987) - *Our Common Future*, defining sustainability, 1992 Rio Conference, the eight Millennium Development Goals of 2000, Rio 20+ conference of 2012 on *The Future We Want* and the UN, SDGs in 2015. *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972), was published more than half a century ago, commissioned by the *Club of Rome* (COR) as the first serious documented warning on climate change, the need for sustainable development, systems transformation and bottoms-up capacity building. The Paris Agreement (2015, 3) made a commitment to contain global warming to 1.5°C above the pre-industrial levels and

limit the increase below 2°C above the pre-industrial levels with a commitment to hold a Conference of Parties (COP<sup>2</sup>) every year. The COR (2024) confirms that the global average warming mark of 1.5°C has already been exceeded between February 2023 to January 2024<sup>3</sup>.

Development is an improvement in well-being associated with the freedom to choose a life people have reason to value. Well-being is the ability to choose functionings based on the capabilities and opportunities individuals have. It is the freedom to choose a life of dignity. Development is sustainable if inter-generational equity and well-being can be ensured in the use of natural resources. All SDGs are critical to development and have to be achieved simultaneously. Goals like gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work (SDG 8) are cross-cutting. For instance, SDG 5 has 85 targets across all SDGs which are gender-specific or gender-relevant. Barbier and Burgess (2020) note that in the pre-COVID period all SDGs did not receive uniform attention despite the goals being interdependent. Some SDGs conflict with each other and negatively impinge on the environment related goals. For instance, SDG 8 is said to be the key to reduction in poverty, hunger and inequality or increase the reach to clean water and energy as provision of decent work and high economic growth ensure sustained increase in gainful employment and incomes for people to address issues related to hunger, poverty, health, education, housing with focus on distribution policies to reduce inequalities. Nonetheless, growth impacts the environment, draws upon resources and conflicts with SDGs 12 to 15. In general, the SDGs are designed to promote sustainable, socially inclusive development. Sustainable development is imperative to attain high SDG scores and there are limits to growth if inter-generational equity matters. A reduction in waste and international spillovers, degradation, depletion and destruction of forests and damage to marine resources is crucial. Unchecked climate change affects future growth. The strong definition of sustainability is preferred to the weak definition which assumes possible substitutability between man-made and natural resources and the possibility of finding solutions to environmental problems with technological innovation by forthcoming generations (Pelenc, 2015).

Ecosystems cannot be revived if natural resources are depleted beyond critical levels. SDSN recommends six inter-related long-term transformations comprising universal



quality education and innovation-based economy; universal health coverage; zero-carbon energy systems; sustainable ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilience; sustainable cities; and increased digital access and services (SDR 2023, 54). SDR (2023) suggests the use of 17 “headline” indicators (SDR 2023, 35) which cover SDSN’s six SDG transformations with inclusion, good governance and curtailment of spillovers with high and significant correlation with the aggregate SDG index for countries. These indicators include poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15/day, undernourishment, life expectancy at birth, secondary completion rate, share of women parliamentarians, population with basic sanitation, access to electricity and the internet, unemployment level, GINI coefficient, annual mean concentration of particulate matter of less than 2.5 microns in diameter, imported SO<sub>2</sub> emissions, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions especially from fossil-fuels and cement production, Ocean Health Index, clean water, Red list Index of species survival, corruption perception index, and Statistical Performance Index (SDR, 2023).

Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany top the list of countries with the highest SDG scores in 2023. Top 20 SDG Index countries are in Europe (SDR 2023, 27). Brazil, Russia and China rank 49, 50 and 63 respectively. India at 112, among 163 countries, is below Bangladesh, Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, South Africa and Sri Lanka (SDR 2023). For the World as a whole, the Report notes that the indicators of hunger and other health indices are below the set targets. There are issues related to land and marine biodiversity, pollution, affordable housing, institutions, global partnerships and peace. By regional groupings, the High Income Countries (HICs) have an average SDG score close to 80 followed by Upper Middle Income Countries (UMICs) with 75, Low Middle Income Countries (LMICs) around 66 and Low Income Countries (LICs) around 55 (SDR 2023, 32).

Another index often used to measure development is the HDI. It is an equal-weighted index using years of schooling and literacy rates, health outcomes in terms of life expectancy and living standards including income as measures of well-being. The value of HDI lies between 0 (worst) and 1 (best). If this measure is above 0.7 it is considered as high human development for a country. The recent data for 2022 shows

HDI of 0.906 for the OECD countries, 0.64 for South Asia and 0.542 for the least developed countries. The world average is 0.739 (SDR 2023).

### **Economic Growth and Ecological Footprint**

Dasgupta et. al (2021) note that during the past 70 years humanity's EF has vastly exceeded the ability of the biosphere to supply goods and services on a sustainable basis. The gap between the rate of growth of world GDP and the rate of decline in natural capital has been rising. This is what they term as the age of sixth mass extinction driven by human activity (WWF, 2024)<sup>4</sup> or the Anthropocene era. This is an era when the "demand humanity makes on the biosphere", from source to sink, "exceeds its ability to supply on a sustainable basis" (Dasgupta et al 2021, 659). This gap is the impact inequality which has not been given due attention as most natural resources suffer from missing/imperfect markets and are available for free.

World population in 1950 was around 2.5 billion and the world GDP at 2011 prices was \$8.2 trillion with an average annual per-capita income of \$3300. Life expectancy was 46 years and more than 60 per cent of world's population was below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day. By 2019, world GDP grew to more than \$120 trillion at 2011 prices (14 times the 1950 level), population increased to 7.7 billion, per-capita income to \$16000, life expectancy to 72 years and globally, people facing extreme poverty fell to 10 per cent (UNDP 2019). But this 'extraordinary achievement' (Dasgupta et al. 2021, 660) has caused extinction of innumerable species and degradation of the biosphere. Managi and Kumar (2018) assert that for 140 countries, over 1992-2014, per-capita man-made capital doubled and human capital increased by 13 per cent but *natural capital declined by 40 per cent. The rate at which humanity has depleted nature has exceeded the rate at which nature can regenerate.* In addition, rising global inequality in income distribution has enlarged the EF. In fact, to save the planet, de-growth, meaning decelerating the rate of growth and reducing consumption is the need of the hour. There is a mismatch between human control and consumption of natural resources, the *EF* and nature's *bio-capacity* to meet this demand. The excess of the former over the latter results in an *ecological deficit*.

The Global Footprint Network (GFN 2024)<sup>5</sup> uses HDI and EF to assess the sustainability of development. We compare the SDG scores and HDI with the Footprint. The GFN defines the EF as the difference between *how much nature we have* and *how much nature we use*. It is the gap between how fast we *consume* resources and generate waste and how fast nature can absorb our waste including Green House Gases (GHGs) comprising carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogenous oxide and Flouride-based gases and regenerate itself<sup>6</sup>. A deficit is a situation when countries demand more from nature than what their ecosystems can regenerate. In addition, they appropriate the resources of other countries reflected in International Spillovers. EF is measured in global hectares per person (gha/person) or as the Number of Earths. The latter measures how many Earths will be required to sustain the living standard of the reference country or if all humanity had the same footprint. The global EF showed a surplus from 1961 to 1970 but after 1970 the world has increased its Footprint and transited from a situation of ecological surplus to a situation of ecological deficit. The EF is higher for developed countries and the Middle East in comparison with the developing world especially Africa. In terms of the Number of Earths the highest Footprint is for Qatar (13.13) followed by Luxembourg (10.96). The EF in terms of the Number of Earths has increased from one to 1.71 between 1971 to 2022 for the entire world (GFN 2024). By region, Europe, North America and West Asia have the largest Footprint although it shows a declining trend for North America and Europe and rising for West Asia. The smallest Footprint is for Asia (with the smallest but *rising* for South Asia) and Africa. Taking the SDG index and the EF together for a sample of countries shows that the countries with higher SDG scores have a larger Footprint<sup>7</sup>. Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Austria have the highest SDG scores, ranging from 86.5 to 82.3 with EF per capita ranging between 7 and 5. China has the SDG score of 72 and EF per person of 3.2 whereas the low SDG countries like South Sudan (39), Central African Republic (39.3) and Somalia (45.6) have the EF per capita slightly above 1. Data also shows a positive relation between human development and the Footprint. The HDI value has increased globally since 1999 but the value in 2022 and 2023 is lower than the pre-pandemic trend line and that the gap between the high and the low HDI countries has increased since 2020 with similar projections for 2023 (HDR 2023, 5). Countries with

higher HDI register a larger footprint, though declining (HDR 2023, 57) while low-HDI countries exert lower planetary pressures and face disproportionately larger adverse impacts of ecological degradation. A comparison between HDI and HDI adjusted for material footprint and CO<sub>2</sub> per capita also confirms that the gap between the two indices is the highest for the *Very High HDI* group (HDR 2023, 302). The gap is the lowest for *LDCs* and the *Low HDI group*.

Another measure of the effects of environmental degradation due to participation in trade and related economic activity is given by International spillovers. They capture the cross-border and trade effects of countries' economic activity and imply that climate and biodiversity crises are caused by both, domestic action/policies and international trade. High SDG index for the HICs is associated with a low spillover index. In contrast, UMICs, LMICs and LICs have higher Spillover and lower SDG Indices (SDR 2023, 32). They occur mainly due to inappropriate pricing of environmental goods and natural capital. Such concerns for externalities is often not part of the policy of safeguarding the commons. Greater global integration via value and supply chains generates cumulative spillover impacts. Hence the imports into the final destination country embody the ecological impact of production of goods, services and components on local water, air and natural resources, in countries which have supplied them. The textiles and clothing sector are responsible for 59 per cent of GHG emissions in the supply chains in the source countries excluding the final destination country due to use of chemicals, electricity, etc (SDR 2023, 33). In addition there are financial, security and socio-economic spillovers, in terms of accidents and child labour, caused by importing countries (SDR 2022, 29). The data highlights that a higher SDG score is associated with larger spillovers or a lower value of the Spillover Index with the correlation coefficient of -0.576. The Index lies between 100 (the best case) and 0 (the worst case). The HICs have the largest share in imported CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (per capita cumulative average per annum) by country groups (SDR 2022, 31).

In terms of GHG emissions, the annual aggregate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which forms 70 per cent of GHG emissions, US, India and China have the largest share (Richie et al. 2023<sup>8</sup>). In 2022, twenty nine per cent of the world's GHG emissions, converted into global tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents, came from China alone, 7.3 per cent from India and 11 per

cent from the US. The next three largest contributors are Brazil, EU27 and Russia. These economies have 50.1 per cent of the world population, 61.2 per cent of world GDP, 63.4 per cent of global fossil fuel consumption and 61.6 per cent of global GHG emissions. Among the top emitters, USA, China and India increased the total emissions in 2022 over the previous year with the largest rate of increase for India. The other three countries experienced a decline in their emissions, the largest being for Russia. Global emissions of GHGs reached a 53.8 Gt CO<sub>2eq</sub>. Share in global emissions for EU27, Russia, South Korea and Brazil declined in 2022 over 2021. However, India, Mexico and Indonesia witnessed a larger increase in their shares by 5, 7 and 10 per cent respectively in 2022 over 2021. Food sector alone contributes 26 per cent to global GHG emissions (Richie 2019).

Data shows a positive relation between the HDI and consumption based per-capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for 2021. Per-capita emissions were 30 tonnes for UAE, 22 tonnes for Australia, 40 tonnes for Bahrain, 32 tonnes for Brunei, 20 tonnes for Canada, 11 tonnes for China, 2.8 tonnes for India (EDGAR, 2023). In 2022, 70 per cent of GHG emissions comprised fossil CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, methane contributed 21 per cent and nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases formed 4.8 and 2.6 per cent respectively. Although Germany, Spain, France and Portugal were the largest emitters in the EU, the EU has reduced its share since 1990 from 14.8 per cent to 6.7 per cent. However, their per-capita shares remain large (Crippa, et. al. 2023).

Global per-capita emissions were 6.76 t CO<sub>2eq</sub> in 2022, up from 6.24 t CO<sub>2eq</sub> in 1990 (EDGAR 2023, 11). Thus global per-capita GHG emissions have increased by 8.3 per cent between 1990 and 2022. By the main activity sectors, power, industrial combustion and processes and transport sectors are the biggest emitters in 2022<sup>9</sup>. In 2022, EU27 saw a consistent decline in all components of GHGs and the US experienced a decline in all but nitrous-oxide emissions. China and India have increased their fossil CO<sub>2</sub> emissions significantly. Emissions from *Land Use, Land Use Change and Forests* (LULUCF) sector is also relevant for climatic variations and GHG emissions.

Most developed countries thus have higher SDG and HDI scores, higher per-capita EF, larger per-capita emissions of GHGs<sup>10</sup>, cause greater pollution and International Spillovers compared to developing economies. Although the EF of developed countries

has been stable for the past two decades due to slower economic growth, their per-capita EF is high when measured in gha per person. The size of the per-capita EF for the US, Germany and Japan exceeds the size for developing countries. The developing countries have increased their EF since the 1990s (Jackson et al., 2019), though less than the developed countries in per-capita terms with the largest aggregate increases for China, India, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa.

Research indicates that a rise in global temperatures by 0.04 degrees centigrade per annum will result in a decline in global per-capita real GDP by 7.22 per cent by 2100<sup>11</sup>. India will be extremely affected by the rise in temperatures with 10 of the 15 hottest cities globally located in India of which 7 will be in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Global warming has increased the incidence of droughts, floods and famines with a decline in India's national income by 2.8%. Heat stress and change in climate are estimated to cost 34 million jobs by 2030 due to productivity losses and impact food security. Sandhani et al. (2020) find an inverse relation between the rise in temperature and growth for states and districts in India for 1980-2019. They note that access to credit, urbanization and roads can mitigate the adverse effects of global warming.

Economic growth is reflected in higher per-capita income, higher consumption and greater resource use. In developing countries environmental degradation and depletion of resources occurs more due to less efficient, often borrowed technology and low investment in green technology due to fiscal constraints further accentuated by lax regulation. Scores for HICs for SDGs 12 and 13 are lower than for other three country groups. This is compensated by a better performance of HICs on SDGs 14 and 15 compared particularly to the middle income countries which include China and India. Developing countries require assistance to obtain green technologies and funds and build-up of human capital. In 2020-21, US, China, Japan, Korea and Germany owned 85% of patents in environmental technology. For growth to be inclusive, green and resilient, cooperation and policy coherence between developed and developing countries on technology, funds<sup>12</sup> and human capital formation is seen as 'global imperatives'<sup>13</sup>.

## Conclusion

Countries with high SDG and human development indices have larger per-capita EFs and Spillovers. The HDI gap between the rich and the poor countries has increased post-pandemic. There is a need to check this pattern, promote circularity and decouple growth from its effect on the environment to attain Agenda 2030 in time. It is of essence to influence the nature and the pace of technological change and govern technology transfer from developed to developing countries. The asymmetry in the provision and distribution of the benefits of development and humanitarian assistance across countries and the delivery of global public goods like climate change mitigation must be addressed. Technology must promote circularity, i.e., reuse, refuse, refurbish, recycle and reduce. The assumption of weak substitution between produced and natural capital and the ability to overcome the loss in the latter aided by technological advancement will render SDGs unsustainable. Reliance solely on technology to overcome the loss of natural capital often intensifies the exploitation of natural resources with the complacency that the future generations shall find solutions to problems of sustainability and paucity of resources in technological advances. It is necessary to align the SDGs with conservation of the biosphere, reduce GHGs, evolve low or zero-carbon technologies, understand the effect of factory farming<sup>14</sup> and curtail plastic waste. Local knowledge systems and capacities should be relied upon to tackle the asymmetric ill-effects of change in climate and environmental degradation on developing countries. National policy must promote sustainable production and consumption, generate low-carbon energy alternatives, contain fossil fuel subsidies and instead use these to evolve green technology and reduce global plastic waste trade, food wastage and food losses embodied in supply chains to curb irresponsible life-styles. Climate Action goal works towards reduction in global GHG emissions, increase resilience and adaptation to natural disasters and encourage the use of renewable energy as part of policy and production and knowledge systems. It calls for adaptation and mitigation efforts and international cooperation and management to reduce inter-generational, inter and intra-spatial inequity of multi-dimensional implications of GHG emissions, spillovers and carbon offshoring for human development. This involves structural adaptation and

management adaptation measures and design and building of climate-resistant infrastructure to tackle actual or expected climate change.

Mitigation efforts aim to reduce the effect of human activity on climate change (EUFIWACC, 2016). Life below water deals with protecting and conserving water bodies and using marine resources sustainably. However there has been an increase in ocean temperatures and acidification with loss of oxygen. This requires efforts to reduce marine plastic pollution and combat over-fishing. Small-scale fisheries and research on ocean health should be encouraged. Almost 33 billion pounds of plastic enters the oceans every year threatening the marine life up to a 100 million each year (UNESCO, 2022). The largest amount of plastic waste is generated by the US, India and China but marine plastic pollution is caused by the Philippines the most. Developed countries use technology and recycling facilities to manage waste whereas a large amount of plastic pollution leaks into the seas and oceans due to lax regulation and inadequate access to waste management technology in developing countries. This affects marine life and ecosystems whereby micro plastics enter the food chain. Life on land including non-human animals aims to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems, encourage sustainable forest management, control desertification and protect biodiversity.

The SDGs are weak on planetary integrity. It is important to set limits to economic growth and recognise environmental constraints. Historically the EKC or the Environment Kuznets' Curve shows an inverted-U shaped relation between growth and environmental degradation. The UNEP (2011) warned that in 2050 humans will consume 140 billion tons of ores, minerals, fossil fuels and biomass per annum which is three times the then prevailing rate and shall produce waste amounting to 13.1 bn tonnes which shall be 20 per cent more than the level in 2011.

Overall, a higher SDG score is positively associated with achievements on most individual goals but not on SDG 12 and 13 especially for HICs. Rather high aggregate scores are often related with higher EF per-capita. For emerging economies especially China and India the Footprint and GHG emissions are rising fast albeit smaller in per-capita terms. By 2027 China will double its consumption level of what it was in 2017. India will increase its consumption from \$1.5 trillion to \$6 trillion by 2030. It is imperative that people make sustainable consumption choices. Dasgupta et al. (2021)



show that the Earth's resources can only support a population of around 3.3 billion at \$20,000 per-capita income at 2011 prices if development is sustainable. Sustaining 9 billion humans in 2100 (UN's lower-end projection) at the desired level of living standard seems a long draw on global bio-capacity. However UNDP (2022, i) has revised these projections to 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 10.4 billion in 2100. This is a cause of greater concern for sustainability especially for regenerative and sustainable agriculture systems to ensure food security particularly in poorer countries, using the Blue Economy as a source of food and undertake renewable and clean energy investments<sup>15</sup>. Humanity *must address* the perils of climate change, ecological damage and conflict with international cooperation and policy coordination to tackle hunger, poverty, unemployment and gender issues else it will asymmetrically and adversely impact all aspects of life and human development in the developing world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The seventeen SDGs are - No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean water and Saanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Indsutry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Cities and communities, Responsible Production and Consumption, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Insitutions and Global Partnership for the Goals (UN Sustainable Development - <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>).

<sup>2</sup> COP (Conference of the Parties) is the primary decision-making body of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Its first meeting was held in 1995 in Berlin. UNFCCC is the agreement between 197 States and the EU which aims to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a level which will prevent the harmful anthropogenic or human-induced interference with the climate system (Cambridge Insitute of Sustainability Leadership - CISL, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.clubofrome.org/blog-post/dunlop-spratt-global-warming/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldwildlife.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Global Footprint Network (GFN)

<sup>6</sup> GFN (2024)

<sup>7</sup> For reasons of space we compare top 9 and bottom 7 countries with India and China ranked by SDG scores.

<sup>8</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

<sup>9</sup> Other sectors include agriculture, buildings, fuel exploitation and waste.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson et al. (2019).

<sup>11</sup> Mishra et al. (2020) note the how climate change impacts the Indian economy at the sectoral levels. Sandhani et al. (2020) also look at the effect of climatic changes at the national and the regional/local levels.

<sup>12</sup> Mohieldin et al. (2023) note that LICs have 8.4 per cent of world's population and less than 1 per cent of world's investment. LMICs have 42.9 per cent of word's population and only 15 per cent of world's investment spending. On the other hand the HICs have only 15.8 per cent of world's population and have more than 50 per cent of world's investment spending.

<sup>13</sup> IMF (2019, 23)

<sup>14</sup> This involves using non-human animals as agricultural machines producing protein in the form of meat, milk, eggs, etc and causes stress to animals, air, water, land, ecosystems and climate. Loss of forests results in displacement of indigenous people, loss of habitats and natural ecosystems, emission of GHGs, diversion of land use to industrial animal agriculture for cheap food, acidification and loss of marine life and livelihoods of coastal communities. All this highlights the need for responsible production and consumption.

<sup>15</sup> Barbier and Burgess (2020) and Jackson et al (2019) note that fossil fuel subsidies and irrigation subsidies should be swapped and redirected towards provision of clean water and sanitation and clean energy.

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## Assessing the Geopolitical Transition from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific

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### Abstract

*The concept of the Indo-Pacific has gained notable significance in contemporary discourse, originating from Karl Haushofer's seminal work, 'Indopazifischen Raum,' and later brought to prominence by Gurpreet Khuranna's exploration in 'Security of Sea lanes: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation.' Given India's peninsular geography, boasting eleven maritime and island territories, its geopolitical circumstances closely align with those of island nations. Over the past two decades, global dynamics have witnessed a transformative shift, necessitating India's heightened focus on maritime security. This paper contends that the evolving terminology surrounding the Indo-Pacific presents India with a strategic opportunity to augment its role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Recognising the region as the potential centerpiece of the 21st century, the paper argues that neglecting developments influenced by strategic interests and shifts in military balances could jeopardise India's maritime security architecture. Framed within the context of the growing significance of the Asian continent, this paper seeks to comprehend the shift in focus, with a particular emphasis on India's role. The term itself underscores India's pivotal role as a net security provider in the region. While the genesis of the Indo-Pacific concept can be largely attributed to Chinese assertiveness, as exemplified by its string of pearls strategy in the Indian Ocean, the paper underscores that this evolving paradigm offers India a spectrum of opportunities and strategic advantages. By embracing this conceptual shift, India finds itself in a propitious disposition to navigate the complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, safeguard its maritime interests, and play a central role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the region.*

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, Asia-Pacific, String of Pearls, Maritime security

## Introduction

In the vast expanse of global geopolitics, the transition from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific marks a pivotal shift. This evolution is not merely semantic but reflective of profound changes in the geopolitical landscape, with implications stretching far beyond the confines of traditional boundaries since Asia has been in reshaping of strategic alliances, change in economic dynamics, and emerging regional power structures. At the heart of this transition lies the recognition of the Indian Ocean as a central theatre of strategic competition, transforming the narrative from one centred solely on the Pacific to a broader, more inclusive Indo-Pacific framework (Baruah 2020, 4). The Asia-Pacific, commonly known as APAC, is a geographical region situated in or around the Western Pacific Ocean. While lacking a precise definition, this expansive area generally encompasses East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia, and Oceania. Within the broader framework of the Asia-Pacific, three principal constituents emerge: Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania in the South western Pacific Ocean. The concept of the Asia-Pacific gained prominence during the 1980s, a period coinciding with the rapid economic growth experienced by emerging markets in the region. 'Asia's Pacific powers' championed this idea, using the term to articulate a shared regional identity. It is noteworthy that despite its nomenclature suggesting inclusion, India has not been in the Asia-Pacific framework (Pulipaka & Musaddi 2021, 5-6). One of the key multilateral institutions representing the Asia-Pacific is the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ("What is Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation?" 2023, n.p.). Established to foster economic cooperation and integration among member economies, APEC plays a significant role as a platform for dialogue and collaboration within the region. Its effectiveness in representing the diverse interests of the Asia-Pacific underscores its importance in shaping the economic dynamics of the region (Singh n.d., para 1).

The Indo-Pacific, also referred to as the Indo-West Pacific or the Indo-Pacific Asia, constitutes a distinctive bio-geographic region within Earth's seas. Encompassing the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the connecting seas in the general vicinity of Indonesia, this expansive maritime zone holds critical significance ("US commits to Indo-Pacific" 2018, 1-2). The term 'Indo-Pacific' finds its historical roots in the 1920s when Karl Haushofer introduced it in his work 'Indopazifischen Raum' known as Indo-Pacific Space. However, its contemporary resonance in the Indian context can be traced back to Kalidas Nag, who, in his seminal work *India and the Pacific World*, portrayed the region as a primarily 'cultural and civilisational entity' (Raghavan 2019, 2). In recent times, analysts have discerned the strategic

interconnection between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, a notion that gained prominence with Shinzo Abe's reference to the integration of these two vast maritime expanses in his 'Confluence of the Two Seas' address to the Parliament of India wherein he called for a 'broader Asia' where the Pacific and the Indian Oceans together were referred to as the 'seas of freedom and prosperity'. Abe's speech was significant for many reasons such as that this speech was delivered in the Indian Parliament and that he mentions about a book authored by Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in 1655, *Majma-ul-Bahrain* which translates as the 'confluence of the two seas' (MoFA Japan 2007, 1). Raghavan in his work, 'The Changing Seas- Antecedents of the Indo-Pacific' iterates that while Dara Shikoh broadly meant the confluence of Islam and Hinduism in his work but for Abe it primarily ideated a 'broader Asia' in which 'Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of.....prosperity' (Raghavan 2019, 1). This perspective was further underscored by Gurpreet Khurana (2007, 139) in his work 'Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation'. As the Indo-Pacific evolves as a crucial geopolitical concept, understanding its historical origins, cultural dimensions, and strategic implications becomes imperative in comprehending the contemporary dynamics shaping this vital region. Additionally, it is also to be noted that although Indo-Pacific would not have existed in the framework that it exists now the linkages between both the linkages go back many centuries in the form of trade which is mentioned throughout seminal works such as 'The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Book of Han (Vol. 28, Treatise on Geography), K.N. Nilakanta Sastri's *South Indian Influences in the Far East* and R.C. Majumdar's *Hindu Colonies in the Far East*.

In an insightful interview conducted by Mercy A. Kuo, Gurpreet Khurana delineated the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct, emphasising two pivotal points. Firstly, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific is attributed to an eastward shift toward the Asian continent, presenting a region replete with both geo-economic opportunities and concurrent security challenges. Secondly, Khurana posited that the concept of the Indo-Pacific underscores the growing significance of India, notwithstanding the term's direct association with the Indian Ocean. He contends that India is anticipated to assume a more substantial role within the broader Indo-Pacific region (Kuo 2018, 2-3).

The nomenclature 'Indo-Pacific' is intricately linked to the rise of Chinese assertiveness, notably through its string of pearls strategy. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific can be comprehended as an idea conceived to harmoniously integrate the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific region, strategically addressing the burgeoning comprehensive power of China (Kuo 2018, 3-4). This conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific seeks

to amalgamate the two major oceans of the world—the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean—along with the contiguous landmasses. While its geographical boundaries remain undefined, the region extends from the coast of East Africa, traverses the Indian Ocean, and reaches the Western Pacific. According to Singh, the Indo-Pacific encapsulates a transformative shift in influence from the west to the east, effectively capturing both the economic and strategic dimensions of the region (Singh n.d., para 2).

Wada Haruko contributes to the discourse by proposing that the ‘inherent’ core area of the Indo-Pacific spans from India to Southeast Asian countries, encompassing the seas from the eastern Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. She asserts that the concept of the Indo-Pacific has undergone geographical adjustments, converged eastwards and diverging westwards. Haruko highlights the diverse national perspectives in defining the region, noting that each country formulates its interpretation based on diplomatic and strategic considerations. In her analysis, she delves into the evolving conceptualisations of the Indo-Pacific by different countries, seeking to comprehend the underlying reasons behind these definitional shifts (Haruko 2020, 16)

### **Understanding the Shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific:**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century is marked by significant events in the global world scenario as it saw two world wars and colonialism giving way to free and sovereign nation-states. Post World War II, the world was in the clutches of the Cold War which led the world to be divided into two power blocs vis-à-vis the US and erstwhile USSR. It was during this Cold War that different regions were divided into further sub-units such as South Asia, West Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The term Southeast Asia only emerged during the Second World War when Southeast Asian Command was placed under General Douglas Macarthur. While the Eastern Ocean was still getting used to the post-colonial world order the Western Pacific Ocean acquired the terminology of Asia-Pacific. Although this concept emerged as early as the 1960s it was consolidated only in the late 1980s when Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was formed (Sundararaman 2023,17).

It is important to note here that Asia-Pacific had a security dynamic at its core and was led by the United States. Initially, the creation of APEC meant a region-wide approach which was similar in principle to NATO as only two countries had joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) which were Thailand and the Philippines. To make SEATO more relevant, the US even brought in the Colombo Powers which comprised of India, Indonesia, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan (Yates 2019, 57). Since this did not work US focused on a security architecture that was primarily focused on engaging with states that were considered vital for its



interest which was primarily to contain the USSR which is termed as the ‘hubs and spokes’ arrangement according to Huisken (2009). This meant larger force deployment in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia, South Korea and Taiwan in East Asia, and Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific. Huisken argues that it was the US presence in the region that supported its economic growth too. US’s engagement with East Asian nations was primarily bilateral in nature while in Southeast Asia it was multilateral. In the post-cold War period, ASEAN flourished and managed to stay relevant which also led to the expansion of ASEAN processes and the evolution of mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum; the East Asia Summit; the Shangri La Dialogue (ADMM+); ASEAN Expanded Maritime Forum. Although ASEAN remained relevant it was only for a while especially as China started coming to the forefront. As China’s ascent started to influence the regional and global order, the ASEAN’s ability to handle regional tensions started to deteriorate noticeably, particularly among its own members as they started to have different perspectives on China’s rise (Huisken 2021, 4-7). In the context of the conflict over the South China Sea, the pulls and pressures that were occurring inside the Association of Southeast Asian Nations started to affect the organization’s cohesiveness. For the first time in the 45-year history of the ASEAN, the ministerial summit that took place in July 2012 was led by Cambodia. During the summit, the members were unable to even reach a consensus on a Joint Communiqué. As a result of the Philippines’ decision to take their maritime dispute with China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which issued its findings in June of 2016, this was further strengthened. China issued a statement in which it firmly rejected the finding, indicating that it did not agree to adhere to the decision and that the regional governments of the ASEAN would not use this ruling as leverage to settle the South China Sea conflict (Sundararaman 2023, 20-21).

With the ongoing development of the US-China competition, there is a growing need for ASEAN cohesiveness. Additional institutions have developed, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and more recently, the Australia, United Kingdom, United States (AUKUS) pact. A significant obstacle faced by several smaller nations in the Indo-Pacific area is China’s proposition of aid for infrastructural development, which extends across the whole Indo-Pacific region and is progressively expanding into Africa as well. These states that need money to build up important facilities are often tempted to get help from China, which doesn’t come with many conditions. Nevertheless, two notable challenges arise from this type of infrastructure development. Firstly, numerous states find themselves trapped in a cycle of debt due to these infrastructure requirements. Secondly, in cases where they are unable to repay the loans from China, China gains significant

control over these infrastructure projects, which can be utilised for both economic and military purposes. This significantly affects the geopolitical dynamics in the broader region by effectively diminishing the strategic independence that individual governments have about China. Multilateralism has become more apparent as states continuously hedge against major powers while developing foreign policy practices that uphold their sovereignty and seek agreement on important issues that uphold the existing normative order (Sundararaman 2023, 23).

The transition from the conventional 'Asia-Pacific' (APAC) to the emerging conceptual framework of 'Indo-Pacific' unfolds as a multifaceted geopolitical recalibration, exemplifying dynamic shifts in global power dynamics. Originating as an economic concept proposed by Asia's Pacific powers, APAC defines a specific geographical region comprising Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania (Vermeer 2018, 5-6). However, its limitations lie in its exclusion of India, a significant actor in the broader geopolitical landscape. In contrast, the Indo-Pacific signifies an evolving and integrated geopolitical construct, extending its geographical expanse from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, encompassing the landmasses that connect them. This transition is not merely a semantic shift; it embodies a strategic and economic realignment, with India emerging as a pivotal stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific's maritime security and cooperation domain. This shift, as Dobell observes, delineates APAC as an economic concept connecting maritime with the continental, while Indo-Pacific is a maritime concept, transcending the Asian landmass and replacing it with expansive maritime domains—a dichotomy reminiscent of the opposing views of Mackinder and Mahan (Dobell 2018, 1-3).

China's ascent and its assertive pursuit of shaping the regional order to align with its national interests have played a central role in this terminological transition. The articulation of China's ambitious 'Belt and Road Initiative' served as a catalyst, contributing to a counter-narrative that materialised as the Indo-Pacific (Heiduk & Wacker 2020, 29). This transformation reflects China's recognition of the economic and military inseparability of the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Avdaliani 2020, 3). Rory Medcalf (2012, 2-4) characterises the Indo-Pacific as an emerging Asian strategic system. Medcalf suggests that this framework is defined by the expanding interests and reach of China and India, with the continued strategic role of the United States. The Indo-Pacific, according to Medcalf, encompasses intersecting interests of major maritime powers, including the US, China, India, and Japan, shaping the wider regional context in which China's ascent unfolds. In this dynamic context, the Indo-Pacific map of Asia not only dilutes Chinese influence but also provides the broader regional backdrop against which China's rise is unfolding. In essence, the shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-

Pacific transcends a mere terminological adjustment; it mirrors the profound reconfiguration of power dynamics, strategic alliances, and economic cooperation in the contemporary geopolitical landscape, driven by the intersecting interests and strategic imperatives of major global players in this dynamic and expansive region.

### **Interpreting the Indo-Pacific: Divergent Perspectives and Challenges**

Diverse interpretations of the Indo-Pacific region among different countries have not only elevated its political and economic significance but have also set the stage for a significant power struggle, particularly between the United States and China. This shift from the traditional Asia-Pacific framework to the Indo-Pacific is not merely a result of immediate political considerations but reflects profound and transformative geopolitical shifts occurring over the past two decades (Avdaliani 2020, 1-2). The conceptual contest over defining Asia as a region is exemplified by the Indo-Pacific framework, which recognises the growing economic, geopolitical, and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Described as a single 'strategic system' (Medcalf 2012, 2-3), this concept has been embraced by influential nations like the United States, Australia, Japan, India, France, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and ASEAN, adopting 'Indo-Pacific' as a policy symbol of regional engagement (Haruko 2020, 1). However, within this consensus, varying national intentions emerge. While the United States, Japan, and Australia see the Indo-Pacific as a crucial arena for strategic influence, India views it as a geostrategic opportunity to foster regionalism and enhance its foreign policy strategy. This nuanced divergence in perspectives reflects the complex dynamics and divergent strategic objectives within the Indo-Pacific region (Chacko 2012, 3-4).

The conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific introduces inherent limitations, primarily due to the expansive and undefined nature of this vast region. Its sheer magnitude renders it challenging to establish it as a seamlessly integrated zone of strategic cooperation. Given its size and complexity, the Indo-Pacific does not currently represent a unified and independent geopolitical entity. Varied national interpretations of the region, shaped by distinct security concerns, underscore the absence of a cohesive and integrated identity. It is crucial to recognise that not all geopolitical challenges within the Indo-Pacific have universal implications for every country in the region. Tensions such as those between India and Pakistan may be of marginal concern to East Asian countries, just as tensions in the Korean Peninsula may have limited relevance for South Asia. While China's assertiveness emerges as a central concern, prompting U.S. involvement in the region, it is essential to

acknowledge that the apprehension surrounding China's rapid ascent is not confined exclusively to the Indo-Pacific. Rather, it extends to the broader Asia-Pacific region, indicating that the geopolitical dynamics driving U.S. engagement are rooted in overarching concerns beyond the geographical confines of the Indo-Pacific (Medcalf 2015, 4-5).

The lack of a standardised and universally accepted concept for the Indo-Pacific underscores a significant challenge in contemporary geopolitical discourse. One primary obstacle lies in the diverse perspectives held by various countries, making it imperative to formulate a concept that accommodates the differing views. Despite contested interpretations, Haruko identifies certain commonalities between these perspectives. Firstly, there is consensus on recognising the 'two oceans as a single maritime domain'. Second, there is widespread acknowledgment of India's inclusion in the region. Third, most perspectives position Southeast Asian countries as central to the concept. However, the simultaneous existence of parallel regional concepts like 'Indo-Pacific', 'Asia Pacific', and 'East Asia' poses a formidable challenge, indicative of a lack of coherent and universal understanding (Haruko 2020, 21-22).

The contested interpretations of the Indo-Pacific revolve around various key aspects: the geographical extent of the region, the objectives associated with the concept, the question of whether to include or exclude China, the significance of adopting bi, mini, and multilateral approaches, and the overarching notion of maritime security. These divergent ideas highlight the complexity of navigating the Indo-Pacific discourse, emphasising the need for nuanced and inclusive frameworks that address the multifaceted nature of this strategically significant region.

### **India's Strategic Role: Navigating the Changing Paradigm**

The Indo-Pacific framework has positioned India strategically, underscoring its pivotal role in the region, strategically countering China's influence. This redefinition of Asia has roots in the expanding interests of China, prompting India to recalibrate its maritime strategy. Explicitly demonstrated in India's Maritime Security Strategy of 2015, there is a pronounced shift from a 'Euro-Atlantic' focus to a more region-specific 'Indo-Pacific' orientation. While not explicitly stated, China emerges as a significant impetus behind India's embrace of the Indo-Pacific concept. China's strategic encirclement policy, embodied in initiatives like the String of Pearls, concerns related to freedom of navigation, and China's robust military presence in the region, have substantially influenced India's Indo-Pacific stance. Unlike the strong commitment to the 'Free and Open

Indo-Pacific’ propagated by the United States under the Trump administration, India’s emphasis lies on the overall security and growth of the entire region, with a particular focus on ASEAN-centered organisations (Heiduk & Wacker 2020, 23-24). This nuanced approach reflects India’s pragmatic response to regional dynamics, seeking a balance between strategic considerations and collaborative growth in the Indo-Pacific.

The heightened global significance of the Indo-Pacific region prompted the establishment of the ‘Indo-Pacific division’ by the Ministry of External Affairs, India, in April 2019. This initiative aims to consolidate India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific by providing substantive policy elements and programs to support that vision (MEA 2020, 1). India envisions a multi-polar world order in collaboration with like-minded countries in the region. However, the international community expresses concerns, perceiving such intentions as reminiscent of a Cold War outlook, drawing parallels with historical alliances like the Warsaw Pact and NATO. The Indian Ocean, situated within the broader Indo-Pacific, holds paramount importance for India, serving as a pivotal maritime domain. India’s economic, political, and maritime security are intricately tied to this region, necessitating strategic efforts to enhance its diplomatic and naval capabilities. To bolster its influence in Indo-Pacific affairs, India must reinvigorate its diplomatic endeavours and naval forces. This entails the formulation of mini-lateral ties, a focus on a blue economy, the development of a blue water navy, the pursuit of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), and the strengthening of existing relations with Indo-Pacific countries (Saha 2023, para 2-4). For instance, India recently handed Missile Corvette INS Kirpan to Vietnam in 2023 (Pandit 2023) and sealed a Brahmos deal with Philippines in 2022 (Peri 2022).

Aligned with this vision is India’s comprehensive approach encapsulated in the ‘Security and Growth for All in the Region’ (SAGAR), serving as the foundation for initiatives such as ‘Sagarmala’ (Ministry of Shipping, India 2020, para 1). These strategic initiatives collectively contribute to shaping an open, integrated, and balanced vision of the Indo-Pacific under India’s leadership. In navigating the complex geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific, coexistence among significant powers is deemed crucial for regional prosperity. It is important to find a middle ground, as both unilateralism and inclusive multilateralism can have destabilising effects on the region. Therefore, a third way must be devised, advocating for mini-lateral agreements as a pragmatic approach to feasible security cooperation (Medcalf 2015,10-12). This nuanced perspective underscores the necessity for collaborative efforts to ensure stability and balance in the Indo-Pacific region, acknowledging the diverse perspectives and interests of the key players involved.

## **Discussion**

The shift from ‘Asia-Pacific’ to ‘Indo-Pacific’ has been significant, especially since it holds the Indian Ocean region as integral to the Asia-Pacific. This shift is characterised by a multitude of factors, such as the rising assertiveness of China, the growing significance of India, and a global shift towards Asia. Therefore, it won’t be wrong to state that the Indo-Pacific as a concept has gained acceptance and is important in shaping contemporary world affairs.

China’s rise as a major global power has led to increased tensions, especially in the South China Sea. China’s assertion and claim of Paracel and Spratly Islands go back as far as 1951, when Zhou Enlai, the then PRC Foreign Minister, while responding to the Treaty of San Francisco, stated that, ‘In fact, the Paracel Archipelago and Spratly Island, as well as the whole Spratly Archipelago.....have always been Chinese territory’ (Furtado 1999, 389-390). This assertion of the Chinese has been a primary bone of contention in the Asia-Pacific grouping, but the Indo-Pacific framework presents a more nuanced approach to addressing this traction. Indo-Pacific’s approach stresses principles like a rules-based order, freedom of navigation, and ASEAN centrality.

While the 20<sup>th</sup> century was considered a European century, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is without a doubt an Asian century because the Indo-Pacific has gained traction, which has resulted in fostering economic cooperation and connectivity in the region through initiatives such as the Quad, which brings together the US, Japan, India, and Australia. The increased emphasis on free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific has led to increased infrastructure development, trade, and investment in the region.

In addition to that, this shift to the Indo-Pacific has highlighted non-traditional security challenges. For instance, two Tuvalu islands out of nine due to the rising sea levels have been on the verge of submergence and sinking (Roy 2019, 1-2). Furthermore, it has contributed to sustainable development and provided a framework for cooperation in climate change mitigation. The sea lanes of communication in the Indo-Pacific are critical for global trade. Consequently, this shift prompts the world to strengthen maritime security and cooperation to address and combat challenges such as piracy and illegal fishing. As a result, the shift reflects and acknowledges the interconnectedness and independence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, leading the world to look for a framework that is inclusive and prosperous for countries all across the region.

## Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific is a dynamic geopolitical construct that is still evolving with a lot of untapped potential. The transition from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific signifies a steady shift in perspective. While the Asia-Pacific was primarily economic, the Indo-Pacific expanded beyond economics and embraced other dimensions such as maritime security and geo-strategic consideration. Increased collaboration among nations has resulted from this conceptual shift, which is based on principles of order, free and open navigation, and inclusivity. However, this region still faces the challenge of confronting Chinese aggressiveness, both economically and strategically. This construct places India at a strategic advantage, which simultaneously calls for India's active role in the region.

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## Climate Exodus: Charting the Overlooked Significance of Environmental Refugee Crisis

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### Abstract

*Climate change has become an omnipresent term in today's discourse, dominating headlines, prominently featured in global summits, government manifestos, nation's foreign policies and across various facets of global governance. Yet amidst the urgency lies a silent crisis, one often overlooked on the world stage: the plight of environmental refugees. These are the people forced from their homes by the ravages of climate change i.e. by rising seas, prolonged droughts, desertification, natural disasters etc. World Bank projects 143 million environmental refugees by 2050 and another 1.2 billion displacements. The paper discusses who these refugees are, their rights, their global perspective and their present situation. It analyses the two prominent human-induced disasters i.e. desertification and rising sea level. It also the present policies for this refugee crisis, their impact and what could be done further.*

**Keywords:** Environmental refugees, climate change, disaster, migration, desertification, rising sea level.

### 1. Introduction

Australia and Tuvalu signed a treaty called the 'Falepili Union' on November 9, 2023. The treaty includes the creation of a new migratory route for 11,600 Tuvaluans in the event of their country's submergence (Kitara and Farbotko 2023). Amid the worldwide problem of tackling climate change, the stories of these people displaced by environmental forces remain untold and lack formal global recognition. Even when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledged that the most significant repercussion of climate change could potentially be the displacement of human populations (IPCC 1992, 103). Still, they are the forgotten casualties of a warming planet, left to navigate a world unprepared for their existence.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highlights climate change as a threat multiplier, causing 95 per cent of displacements in 2020 in countries susceptible to conflict. This issue amplifies the effects of other factors like poverty and resource depletion, leading to conflict and displacement (UNHCR 2021, 26). Climate change-related disasters have led to an increase in the number of environmental refugees. Each year, weather-related occurrences force 21.5 million individuals to be displaced, twice those displaced due to conflict or violence since 2010 (Ida 2021). A 2018 World Bank report projected that by 2050, around 143 million people may be forced to migrate due to climate change

in various regions (Rigaud et al. 2018, 110). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of data regarding climate refugees, but certain projections indicate that a minimum of 1.2 billion could be displacement due to climate-related incidents by the year 2050 (Institute for Economics & Peace 2020, 9). Amidst the ongoing conflicts around the world, such as the Sudan Conflict, the Armenia Crisis, the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Russia-Ukraine War 2022, the Israel-Gaza Conflict 2023 and many others, the political refugee crisis has deteriorated. Under these severe crises, the ongoing and forthcoming crisis of environmental refugees remains hidden.

## **2. Who are the Environmental Refugees?**

The phrase ‘environmental refugees’ was introduced by Lester Brown in 1970, but the formal discussion on them began in 1985 with the publication of a report by El-Hinnawi on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (Berchin et al. 2017, 148). According to El-Hinnawi (1985, 4), they are *‘those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardises their existence and/or seriously affects the quality of their life’*. This migration can be temporary or even permanent in certain cases. Hollifield and Salehyan (2015) termed the displacement of thousands of people from their homeland as *‘a hidden cost of climate change.’* The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines them as:

*‘Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad’* (IOM 2007, 1–2).

Cairns (2008, 19) claims that environmental refugees are created when the rate of human population increase surpasses the region’s ability to support it or when natural or man-made factors lead to a depletion of natural resources. In addition to natural reasons, Brown (2008, 9) also highlights non-climate factors, such as policies by governments, community-level resilience to natural catastrophes and population expansion. Climate change is both directly and indirectly contributing to the phenomenon of climate migration. The issue arises due to many factors, including diminished agricultural output, elevated sea levels impacting low-lying islands and coastal regions, heightened prevalence of infectious diseases, depletion of municipal and irrigation water, desertification, and pollution. Mayers (2002, 609) claims that population pressures and extreme poverty typically worsen these concerns.

### **3. Global Perspective on Environmental Refugee Crisis**

The global assessment of the environmental refugee issue highlights the immediate necessity for synchronised efforts to tackle the increasing effects of climate change which are causing the displacement of millions of individuals globally. First, we need to address the issue of climate change, its drivers and implications. The identification of a hole in the ozone layer in the Earth's atmosphere over the Antarctic region in 1985, made by three British scientists brought about a significant transformation in the scientific understanding and raised awareness about the need for environmental conservation (Farman, Gardiner, and Shanklin 1985, 210). It served as a tangible demonstration of humanity's capacity to harm the Earth's atmosphere, while also becoming one of the most renowned achievements in the annals of climate activism. Many environmental conventions, summits and climate-specific organisations were formed to check the climate deterioration over the years.

Despite conservation efforts, in 2011, ozone depletion created an 'ozone hole' in the Arctic stratosphere (Lindsey 2012). Human actions, mostly through the emission of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally led to global warming, causing the average global surface temperature to exceed 1.1°C above the pre-industrial level of 1850-1900 between 2011 and 2020. Human activities are leading to swift alterations in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere. This is impacting global weather patterns and disrupting the lives of 3.3-3.6 billion individuals by diminishing food and water security. The average sea level worldwide rose by 0.20 (0.15 to 0.25) metres from 1901 to 2018 (IPCC 2023, 6–7). This implies that there are some shortcomings in conservation policies and actions.

### **4. Environmental Refugee Crises Worldwide**

Environmental migration concerns individuals who are compelled to depart from their native area as a result of abrupt or prolonged alterations to their immediate or broader ecological surroundings. Myers (2002, 609) mentioned 25 million environmental refugees in 1995. Multiple factors, methodological constraints and a lack of data collection standards make quantifying environmental migration difficult even today. However, according to the World Bank (2021) report, climate change may necessitate the internal migration of around 216 million individuals within their own countries by 2050, spanning six global regions:

**Table 1: Displacement in regions by 2050. *Source:* (World Bank 2021)**

| Sr. No. | Region                          | Migration (in Millions) |
|---------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1       | Sub-Saharan Africa              | 86                      |
| 2       | East Asia and the Pacific       | 49                      |
| 3       | South Asia                      | 40                      |
| 4       | North Africa                    | 19                      |
| 5       | Latin America                   | 17                      |
| 6       | Eastern Europe and Central Asia | 5                       |

The data highlights the severity of the issue and if cross-border migration is also considered, the crisis becomes much worse.

Climate change exacerbates existing threats and amplifies their impact. It has the potential to exacerbate financial uncertainty and political turbulence hence potentially leading to increased migration. Droughts in the ‘dry corridor’ of Central America limit crop production, causing food and economic insecurity for farmers, often leading to migration north in search of better opportunities (Jordan 2021). By 2050, more than one billion people might be exposed to coastal-specific climate dangers, forcing millions to abandon their homes (IPCC 2022, 15).

There are several reasons for migration, but two significant reasons are desertification and sea level rise. These two reasons are gradual and humans have directly or indirectly contributed to them. Natural disasters are the third major reason, but they are beyond human control. So, analysing the first two makes sense and some of the major hotspots are:

#### **4.1 Desertification**

Desertification is the loss of biological productivity in drylands due to external or human factors, affecting ecosystems like deserts, grasslands, and scrublands. It’s a global issue affecting 36 million square kilometres and potentially uprooting 135 million by 2045, affecting 250 million people (Pimm and Rafferty 2024). Some of the most affected areas globally are:

#### **4.1.1 Horn of Africa (HoA)**

The HoA an area renowned for its intricate socio-environmental dynamics, has experienced substantial repercussions from natural calamities, resulting in migration. It is a geographical region located in Northeast Africa, encompassing the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia. The anomaly patterns of the El Niño Southern Oscillation have a significant impact on the year-to-year changes in regional rainfall (ICPAC and WFP 2018, 5). Between 2008 and 2016, sudden-onset occurrences caused an average of over 350,000 new displacements per year (UNISDR and IDMC 2017, 10). In 2018, high temperatures (approximately 2°C above normal) and drought-like conditions in Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti impacted 12 million individuals. A report by IOM (2023) shows that almost 32.1 million people have been affected and displaced between January and June 2023, severe drought was one of the primary reasons.

#### **4.1.2 Sahel Region**

The Sahel is a semi-arid region located at the southern border of the Sahara desert, encompassing areas of West and Central Africa. The decrease in agricultural production, the decline in fishery productivity and the changing patterns of nomadic pastoralism are causing migration in the Sahel region. The UN (2019) predicts that desertification will lead to a significant rise in migration of around 135 million individuals by 2045. Approximately 65 per cent of the cultivable land in the Sahel region is thought to be degraded. The occurrence of droughts in Niger and Burkina Faso limits the options for migration among agriculturalists, since they may lack the essential resources to relocate. Conversely, in Senegal, populations residing near the borders depend on migration to neighbouring countries as a means of employment or income (OHCHR 2021, 4).

The whole African continent, especially the HoA and Sahel region, is vulnerable to the threat of desertification. Almost 83.6% of African nations are in danger of desertification (Stallwood 2022) and if not halted, Africa is projected to lose two-thirds of its cultivable land by 2030 (Africa Renewal 2012). Gavin (2022) claims that despite contributing less than 4 per cent to overall greenhouse gas emissions, Africa has already experienced significant repercussions.

#### **4.1.3 Asia**

Over 60 per cent of Central Asia is susceptible to desertification. The high temperatures in certain regions of China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and other nations have raised concerns. Research indicates that the desert environment has expanded further north by more than 100 km in Central Asia since the 1980s (Hu and Han 2022, 6). Qi et al. (2024, 11) claim that more than 72 per cent of land in Mongolia is damaged by desertification. According to a study, in 2005, 81.4 million hectares in India were experiencing various



forms of desertification and 6.73 million hectares were damaged by salinization (IPCC 2019, 264). One of the main causes of migration in Central Asia is land degradation. Approximately 2.5-4.3 million individuals or 10-15 per cent of the economically active population, migrate each year in search of work in the region where drought and desertification generate yearly losses of roughly \$6 billion (UNCCD 2023).

#### **4.2 Rise in Sea Levels (RSL)**

Global coastal communities face a serious threat from RSL. The loss of liveable land along coastlines is one of the many repercussions of this phenomenon, leading to widespread migration. A 2011 report by Nicholls et al. (2011, 1) startled many when it predicted that by 2100, a temperature rise of 4°C or more could result in a 0.5-2.0-meter RSL and might push up to 187 million individuals from their homes. By the end of the century, up to 630 million people could be living in areas that are expected to be flooded yearly (Kulp and Strauss 2019, 1). The study estimates that over one billion people reside in areas below 10 meters above high tide lines and 230 million below one meter. After reviewing 33 papers, McMichael et al. (2020, 21) discovered that 20 of them address the relationship between migration of people and RSL.

The gravity of the issue of RSL can be understood through the open debate in the 9260<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC) held in February 2023 on the impact of RSL on international peace and security. In the debate Secretary-General Antonio Guterres presented a dire picture of the impending global security crisis that rising sea levels herald, predicting *‘a mass evacuation of entire populations on a biblical scale.’* He also emphasised *‘Rising seas are sinking futures.’* North Africa, Western Africa and the Caribbean are facing significant challenges due to flooding, coastal erosion, saltwater encroachment and rising sea levels causing damage and destruction. Megacities including Mumbai, Dhaka, Jakarta, Cairo, Buenos Aires, Maputo, Bangkok, Shanghai, Santiago, Lagos, Copenhagen, New York, London and Los Angeles will be severely impacted (UN 2023). The sinking of these highly populated cities will bring dire consequences and will result in mass migration. Eight Asian countries- India, Bangladesh, Philippines, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and Indonesia are home to 70 per cent of those who would be impacted. Eight Pacific islands, part of the Solomon Islands, have already been flooded by rising sea levels, forcing their population to relocate and two more islands are on the verge of disappearing. It is projected that 48 islands will have sunk by the year 2100 (Cho 2021).

The small islands are the main victims of the RSL. Some of the most impacted and vulnerable are:

- Kiribati: This country’s islands in the Pacific Ocean are mostly located only 6.5 feet above sea level. According to some analysts, Kiribati will flood by 2050 and its 100,000+ residents will have to evacuate.

- Seychelles: The Seychelles, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean, saw a 7.9-inch rise in sea level between approximately 1914 and 2014. Seychelles would be swamped if the water level rose by 3.3 feet.
- Marshall Islands: It consists of 1,225 islands across 29 coral atolls in the Pacific Ocean. The island is at risk of disappearing if sea levels rise by 3.3 feet.
- Maldives: It is the lowest country in the world and consists of a collection of 1,190 islands in the Indian Ocean. 80 per cent of the Maldives' islands are below 3.3 feet from the ocean's surface, with a maximum elevation of 6.5 feet above sea level. By 2050, experts believe the Maldives might be underwater.

Some other islands in danger are Fiji, Palau, Micronesia, Cabo Verde, Solomon Islands, Tangier Island, Sarichef Island, Torres Strait Islands, Carteret Islands and Tuvalu (Butler 2021).

#### 5. Protecting Environmental Refugees

The present state of the international refugee framework appears to be lacking in its capacity to address the needs of individuals who are seeking refuge from environmental disasters and Hollifield and Salehyan (2015) also support the same. They also claim that developed economies are not only neglecting the problem but also actively sabotaging efforts to develop permanent remedies. Major pollution and environmental degradation have been done by the developed countries over the years and Brown (2008, 31) claims that the responsibility of supporting climate migrants will fall on the poorest countries, which are the least accountable for greenhouse gas emissions. If we look at the records, environmental refugees were not recognised for a long period. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the basis for UNHCR's efforts to safeguard refugees. The 1951 Convention largely focuses on refugees who are fleeing persecution or are classified as political refugees and does not explicitly recognize environmental refugees (Richmond 1995, 1; Marshall 2010, 61; Cho 2021; Osóbka 2021, 104).

However, UNHCR (2020, 1–3, 10–11) has a different view and proclaims that the legal and policy frameworks for safeguarding environmental refugees encompass international refugee law, human rights legislation and regional treaties. The legal foundation is comprised of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Africa's 1969 OAU Convention and Latin America's 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. However, Mishra and Singh (2023, 19) claim no concrete instances of safeguarding climate migrants using these accords exist.

The Paris Agreement of 2015-2016 is a significant achievement that integrated migration within the context of climate change. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and IOM have

formed a Task Force on Climate Displacement (TFD) to ensure coherence in policies. The activities of the IOM encompass advocacy, policy work, research, capacity building and operational activity (IOM 2020, 3-4). UNHCR states that it is crucial to acknowledge that not all individuals who are forced to leave their homes because of climate change or disasters will be classified as refugees. Each situation should be evaluated on an individual basis. But Laczko and Aghazarm (2009, 115) and Black et al. (2011, 9) mention it's hard to tell when the environment drives migration alone or with other reasons. Environmental factors can influence mobility and data collection beyond evacuations for fast-onset calamities, difficult due to demographic, financial, political, personal and cultural factors.

## **6. Strategies and Future Directions**

At-risk populations encounter a variety of difficulties, such as the loss of livelihood, insecurity regarding access to food and water and disruption of social networks. The primary objective should be to improve readiness, strengthen adaptability, facilitate organised migration and offer aid and protection to individuals who are displaced. The human-induced disasters need to be checked. Firstly, forming 'The Green Wall' and Dune Stabilization to check desertification, which has been successful in Africa, China and India (Qi et al. 2024, 12). China's forest coverage has significantly increased from 12 per cent in the 1980s to over 22 per cent today through its regeneration efforts. Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) can restore soil fertility, as demonstrated by Niger, can be used globally. Water retention techniques, successful in Kenya and Tanzania, also need to be globalized.

Simply, afforestation is a highly effective strategy for mitigating desertification. The greenhouse gas emissions need immediate attention. The threshold limit of a 1.5°C rise in global warming under the 2015 Paris Agreement needs to be strictly followed and supported financially by developed nations. Renewable energy, recycling, carbon capture and storage, methane emission reduction and afforestation are all basic essential measures. Only when the basic steps are followed then the global warming can be checked. Columbia and Türkiye have achieved significant progress in improving energy efficiency in their buildings, which account for 30 per cent of global energy use and 27 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions. Successful regional techniques need to be globalised and the need is to stick to basics first.

## 7. Conclusion

The adequacy of steps taken and policies made to tackle the issue of environmental refugees is a matter of ongoing debate. However, there is no doubt that enhancing global collaboration and providing legal definitions and assistance for adaptation and resilience measures in regions affected by climate change and disasters are necessary to protect environmental refugees. International safety policies specifically for environmental refugees need to be formed. Developed countries need to take the forefront in assisting and transferring green technologies to others. It should not be misunderstood that the issue will be limited to any specific region but as Brown (2008, 10) claims forced migration will obstruct development by impeding economic expansion, escalating conflict and intensifying strain on urban infrastructure. Prioritizing action and risk management activities in environmental solutions, including collaboration and collective efforts, can significantly reduce the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. It is important to recognize that migration can be a positive, life-saving strategy when properly planned and managed.

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## Challenges in Adopting Sustainable Housing Practices and the Role of Stakeholders:

### A Systematic Review

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#### Abstract

*The idea of sustainability in housing practices is gaining increased recognition across the world because of its potential to reduce the environmental degradation and climate change impact of the housing sector. Not just in reducing the environmental footprint, sustainable housing practices are also said to positively impact the health and well-being of the residents, promote sustainable consumption patterns of energy and other resources, and are generally considered to be socially responsible. However, despite these supposed benefits sustainable housing practices are yet to be implemented on a larger scale. The present paper is an attempt to identify the criteria for sustainable housing and the challenges in adopting sustainable practices in housing by examining the available literature on the topic. The paper will also examine the role of public policy and identify major stakeholders who could play an important role in the successful implementation of sustainable housing. The paper follows the systematic review method to examine the literature.*

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Sustainable housing, Sustainable housing Practices, Public Policy, Stakeholders, Challenges

#### Introduction

Housing is considered as a basic human need. A house has physical, social, and psychological dimensions. Its physical aspect views it as a structure, designed as a living space for one or more individuals or families and constructed using materials of specific quality, depending upon the locality and needs of the residents. Socially, it is defined as a space with specific socio-economic characteristics and holding a particular position in the community to which the house belongs. Psychologically, it is a space designed to provide safety, security, and



comfort to its residents and has a significant impact on the health and overall well-being of the residents. Economists including Ricardo, Jevons, and Marshall define a house as a tangible asset with some return (Henilane, 2016). Melnikas summarises these definitions in these words: “*a specific and relatively limited, physically, biologically socially close place where people and groups of people can live their biosocial life, by receiving services, performing house chores and other biosocial activity* (Melnikas1998, 326; Henilane 2016, 169).

Owning a house is not just about owning an asset, it is also considered a source of comfort, security, social acceptance, and well-being. The demand for housing has shown an increase over the years and the efforts to provide affordable housing to all have been an uphill task for policy makers worldwide. Like any other construct, a house shall also have a lifelong impact on its immediate environment and social settings, which brings housing concerns to the folds of the sustainability debate (Roshanfekr, Tawil, and Goh 2016, 2). Recent years have witnessed deliberate efforts to introduce sustainability measures to residential construction and evaluate and compare various residential projects' sustainability.

Sustainable housing practices ensure that the environmental impact is minimised, resources are efficiently utilized, and residents can afford it while ensuring the overall well-being of the residents (Roshanfekr, Tawil, and Goh 2016, 3; Almusaed and Almssad 2022, 2). Ahn et al (2014, 95-96) account for the benefits of sustainable housing under three heads: Economic benefits which include reduced operating and maintenance costs, increased home value, and optimised life cycle performance; Environmental benefits which include waste reduction, improvement in the environmental quality, conservation of resources and reduction of global warming and climate change; and Social benefits which include increased comfort and health of occupants, heightened aesthetic quality and overall improvement in quality of life.

Implementing sustainable housing practices is not an easy task and requires a systematic, coordinated approach with active participation from all the stakeholders involved to meet the challenges. The present paper explores the potential challenges in the adoption of sustainable housing practices and the role of stakeholders including the Government in the successful implementation through a systematic review of the existing literature.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The paper aims a) to elucidate the criteria of sustainable housing, b) to identify the challenges to sustainable housing, and c) to evaluate the role of public policy and other key stakeholders in adopting sustainable housing practices. The research is undertaken using a systematic review of the literature. For the study, 110 articles were selected after a random search in the Google Scholar database using relevant keywords. The chosen articles included full-text articles and conference proceedings in the English language, from various disciplines. Of the 110 articles, 37 were identified after a detailed exclusion procedure. The articles were excluded based on the following criteria: By title (30 articles), by abstract (26 articles), by lack of relevance (16 articles), and by duplication (1 article). Later, three more articles were identified and included from the selected literature due to their relevance to the study, bringing the number of selected articles to 40.

The period of publication of the papers ranges between 2000-2022. It was noted that most of the documents were published between 2008 and 2015 (21 articles). 17 articles were published in 2016-22 and 3 in 2000-2007. Region-wise classification of the papers indicated that most papers were from Africa (15 articles) and Asia (10 articles). One of the important criteria for selecting a review paper was the keywords that appeared in the paper. It was observed that the most frequently appearing keywords were sustainable housing and sustainability, followed by sustainable development and affordability. Other recurring keywords included housing, barriers, and public housing.

The review of articles based on the objectives covered under the study shows that 12 articles discussed the criteria for identifying and assessing sustainable housing, 18 articles focussed on the challenges in implementing sustainable housing practices, and 16 articles addressed the role of key stakeholders including public policy. The papers could be divided into four categories based on the methodology adopted. 15 articles followed a qualitative approach while 12 articles adopted quantitative methodology. 8 articles adopted the literature review method while 5 articles followed the case study method. It was observed that Structural Equation Modelling was a preferred analytical tool in most of the papers following quantitative analysis, mainly to account for the possible influence of latent variables. 5 of the 8 papers that adopted the literature review method followed systematic review techniques for an in-depth understanding of the topic.

## Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of the review of the primary objectives of the paper are presented. The literature identifies monetary variables such as housing affordability, rental cost, energy efficiency, transportation cost, and safety as key criteria of sustainable housing that impact the household's decisions (Ezennia and Hoskara 2021; Oluleye et al 2020)<sup>1</sup>. Oluleye et al (2020) also emphasize the availability of government funding, low-cost housing finance, the use of sustainable materials, and appropriate land-use planning as important aspects of sustainable housing.

Implementing sustainable practices in residential construction is not an easy task. A major challenge noted by various authors is the lack of proper awareness and understanding among the public about sustainable housing practices (Candel and Torna 2022, 1696-97; Jamaluddin et al 2018, 5-6)<sup>2</sup>. Abuzaid et al (2022, 5) note that the public perception of sustainable housing is heavily influenced by economic and environmental considerations. A major economic challenge seems to be the belief that sustainable houses cost more than traditional houses and carry an element of risk due to unfamiliarity with the techniques, limited expertise and lack of skilled labour, lack of proper information, and lack of market value. The absence of appropriate technology, low-cost materials, and poor participation of beneficiaries hinder the growth of sustainable housing practices (Shehab et al 2017, 368; Jamaluddin et al 2018, 5-6)<sup>3</sup>. Houses are demand-driven commodities that are constructed in the short run. The finance for housing is short or medium-term. This conflicts with the requirements of sustainable construction which requires a long-term perspective (Bradshaw et al 2005, 22). The failure of the existing finance system to identify the long-term value of green investments leads to limited interest among the beneficiaries in investing in such projects (Shehab et al 2017, 368; Adabre and Chan 2020, 3)<sup>4</sup>.

The literature identifies the potential role of government as a facilitator of sustainable practices in the housing sector. However, the lack of proper intervention strategies, well-defined public policy initiatives, and legislation have affected the successful adoption of sustainable housing practices. These measures could go a long way in increasing the demand for sustainable housing (Adabre et al 2022; Abuzaid et al 2022, 3)<sup>5</sup>. According to Zaini (2022, 3), there are no proper guidelines to minimise the initial high cost associated with sustainable construction which leads to limited support from the key stakeholders. Considering that there exists a strong relationship between economic building materials and stakeholder satisfaction, this might be a major roadblock.

The success of any scheme is dependent upon its stakeholders. It is essential to identify the major players in the field who can create a positive environment for adopting sustainable practices. The literature identifies the government as the key player in facilitating the implementation of sustainable practices in housing. The awareness and incentives provided through public policy can have a positive effect on the adoption of sustainability measures (Adabre et al 2022; Abuzaid et al 2022, 3)<sup>6</sup>. Other major stakeholders identified by literature include clients, professionals, contractors, and the financial sector and emphasise the importance of their knowledge and involvement in creating a suitable environment for the adoption of sustainable practices (Li et al 2018, 3; Oluleye et al 2020, 12)<sup>7</sup>.

## Conclusion

With the rapid increase in environmental degradation and climate change, sustainability in the construction sector has become the need of the hour. The literature establishes the relevance of sustainable housing practices and the benefits associated with implementing such measures. However, its implementation is not an easy task, given the information asymmetry that exists regarding sustainable measures and the lack of proper government policies addressing such practices. The literature has identified the impact of public perception on the adoption of sustainability measures in residential construction. Concerns about affordability, maintenance costs, lack of clear regulations, and knowledge among key players in the construction sector have acted as hindrances in the implementation of sustainable practices. The fact that there are no clear benchmarks for assessing the performances of existing sustainable housing projects has also contributed to the reluctance to invest in such projects. Further research can be conducted in this field, as there are numerous opportunities for exploration and discovery, particularly addressing the social and economic sustainability angles, factors influencing the implementation of sustainable housing practices, and the role of public policy in ensuring that people are made aware of the benefits of sustainable construction so that informed decisions can be made.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See also, Gill Seyfang, "Community action for sustainable housing: Building a low-carbon future," *Energy Policy* 38 (2010); Emma Mulliner and Vida Maliene, "CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY. ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING," The 8th International Conference (2011); Kamand M. Roufehaei, Abu Hassan Abu Bakar, and Amin Akhavan Tabassi, "Energy-efficient design for sustainable housing development," *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2013); Albert P.C. Chan and Michael Atafo Adabre,

“Bridging the Gap between Sustainable Housing and Affordable Housing: The Required Critical Success Criteria (CSC),” *Building and Environment*(2019); Michael Atafo Adabre and Albert P.C. Chan, “Towards a sustainability assessment model for affordable housing projects: the perspective of professionals in Ghana”, *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*(2020).

<sup>2</sup> See also, Nicole Ross, Paul Anthony Bowen and David Lincoln, “Sustainable housing for low-income communities: lessons for South Africa in local and other developing world cases”, *Construction Management and Economics*, 28, (2010): 440, Nongiba Alkanam Kheni and Wisdom Dzidzienyo Adzraku, “An Exploratory Study of Challenges to Sustainable Housing Development in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana: Perceptions of Built Environment Consultants”, *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences* (JETEMS) 9(5) (2018): 284-85.

<sup>3</sup> See also, Nicole Ross, Paul Anthony Bowen and David Lincoln, “Sustainable housing for low-income communities: lessons for South Africa in local and other developing world cases”, 441-42; Gill Seyfang, “Community action for sustainable housing: Building a low-carbon future,” 7627; Eziyi O. Ibem and Dominic E. Azuh, “FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMMES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES”, *Journal of Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection*, Vol.1 No.3,(2011): 30; Kai Chen Goh, Ta Wee Seow, and Hui Hwang Goh, “Challenges of implementing Sustainability in Malaysian Housing Industry”, *The International Conference on Sustainable Built Environment for Now and the Future*. Hanoi, (2013).

<sup>4</sup> See also, William Bradshaw, Edward F. Connelly, Madeline Fraser Cook, James Goldstein, & Justin Pauly *The Costs and Benefits of Green Affordable Housing*, (New Ecology, 2005): 22; Baba, Adams Ndalai, Mercy Inikpi Achoba, and Oludayo Tokunbo Otaru, “Evaluating the Prospects and Challenges of Sustainable Housing on National Development in Nigeria”, *IJSRSET*, Volume 1, Issue 5,(2015): 438.

<sup>5</sup>See also, Goebel, Allison, “Sustainable urban development? Low-cost housing challenges”, *Habitat International* 31, (2007): 296; A. O. Olotuah and S. A. Bobadoye, “Sustainable Housing Provision for the Urban Poor: A Review of Public Sector Intervention in Nigeria”, *The Built & Human Environment Review*, Volume 2, (2009): 58; Daniel Robinson and David Edwards, “Sustainable housing design: Measurement, Motivation, and Management in Sutherland Shire, Sydney, Australia”, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, volume 36, (2009); Ilias Said, O. O, “Sustainability in the Housing Development Among

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<sup>6</sup>See also, Goebel, Allison, “Sustainable urban development? Low-cost housing challenges”; Gill Seyfang, “Community action for sustainable housing: Building a low-carbon future,” 7626; Ilias Said, O. O, “Sustainability in the Housing Development Among Construction Industry Players in Malaysia”; Eziyi O. Ibem and Dominic E. Azuh, “FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMMES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES”; David A. Turcotte and Ken Geiser, “A FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE SUSTAINABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT. HOUSING AND SOCIETY”, 37(2). Volume 147, Issue 1(2010); Aribigbola, Afolabi, “Housing Affordability as a Factor in the Creation of Sustainable Environment in Developing World: The Example of Akure, Nigeria.”, *Journal of Human Ecology* (2011); Adesoji David Jiboye, “Achieving Sustainable Housing Development in Nigeria: A Critical Challenge to Governance”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1 No. 9(2011); Nazirah Zainul Abidin, Nor'Aini Yusof and Ayman A.E. Othman, “Enablers and challenges of a sustainable housing industry in Malaysia”, *Construction Innovation: Information, Process, Management*, Vol. 13 Issue 1 (2013); Ibem, Arc Eziyi O., and Egidario B. Aduwo, “A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE HOUSING FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICAL ACTIONS”, A Paper for presentation at Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (2015); Jay Yang and Zhengyu Yang, “Critical Factors Affecting the Implementation of Sustainable Housing in Australia”, *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 30(2)(2015); Mohammad Saraj Sharifzai, Keisuke Kitagawa, Ahmad Javid Habib, Mohammad Kamil Halimee and Daishi Sakaguchi, “Investigation of Sustainable and Affordable Housing Policy Principles and Formulation Adoptable in Kabul City, Afghanistan”, *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 9, No. 2(2016); Xiaolong Gan, Jian Zuo, Peng

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***Poetry is Nearer to Vital Truth than History:***

**A Critical Appraisal of *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* to be Widely  
Incorporated in the Curriculum Across Indian Universities**

**Bhawna Vij Arora**

**Abstract**

*The inefficacy and dereliction of implemented knowledge of policy-making and sciences have left enough apertures for other epistemes to intervene and bring about their own conferment to the idea of climate change. The catastrophe induced by the anthropocentric shifts, 'The Age of Humans' have reshaped and deeply affected the bionomics and different ecological arenas. The social implications and the ramifications of the shifting epoch are hard to pin down while equally impenetrable in their extensiveness and comprehensibility. Entreating and invoking a sustainability mindset cannot be achieved or significantly attributed until the awareness of the outcome or upshot of the darker realities of anthropogenic impact is discussed and brought to the public lore. Poetry responds to the external, material world by problematizing it in ways that only a sensitive, congenial sharply affectational relationship is established by way of being rattled and jolted. As Plato says popularly, "Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history." This paper argues for a systematic inclusion of anthropocentric-inspired poetic text with particular gaze on Sudeep Sen's groundbreaking work *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* to be incorporated in the curriculum across disciplines and in literature, as a text of collective praxis of human community, in a bid to instil and strengthen eco-consciousness, so that the responses to the urgency of environment are dealt holistically; before it worsens from absolute to obsolete, or environment dictates and threatens the existence of every living organism.*

*Through a nuanced reading of the poetic utterances, the paper would further like to establish these pieces as ushering a state of hype-acute sentience by demonstrating its metaphors, diction and other symbolic elements to be a fit subject for a damned and dystopian reality that the denizens are now pushed into. The main thrust of the paper would be to argue for a case of incorporating such a text that focuses on the calamitous realities of the anthropocentric era which has pushed and created a paradigmatic shift in the scholarly and creative imagination portraying the starkest, bare-bone human predicaments due to climate change. The objective of the paper would be to delineate the available corpus of environmental literature across the universities in*

*India, while illustrating in general the potential of poetry and in particular, Sudeep Sen's recent work on climate change and anthropocentric poetic meditations.*

**Key Words: Anthropocene, Indian Poetry in English, Climate Change, Curriculum, SDGs**

### **Introduction**

With man's supremacy of bringing epochal shifts, human rapaciousness has taken over the planet's geology, ecosystems, resources and environment, with venal frenzy playing havoc onto the enduring riches of the planet. Anthropocene has indeed forced a suspension of the typical nature vs culture duality for a complete reconfiguration of human identities to the fellow man/nature or non-human entities of the machine-centric, digitally-controlled world. If with the advent of the fateful shift towards the anthropocenic world, the paramountcy of human and their intrusion has caused impingement and damage to the planet's geology, biosphere and environment, it has also led to an increasing awareness and mindfulness towards saving it in manners for a sustainable living and attentive consumption. In its scope and capacity, United Nations, since the 1990s, has highlighted the importance of education, underlining the immeasurable potentiality that education can encompass to achieve the overall goals of "sustainable development". With Education seen as means and not ends, education for developing a sustainable mindset is seen as a "catalyst", a "main engine-driving the change". Quian Tang, (UNESCO) has squarely pointed out the need to bring a systematic shift in sensibility/perceptibility by emphasizing the role of education. "Education for the SDGs" . . . on the one hand, education is a goal in itself and, on the other hand, it is an instrument of social transformation necessary for the achievement of the rest of the global objectives, through the acquisition of skills, attitudes and behaviors that guide towards a sustainable future" (Ferrer-Estévez and Chalmeta).

This paper makes a case for incorporating such a text and context into the everyday curriculum of the Indian educational system, that not only caters to high sensibilities of perceptual experience regarding the ecosystem but also instil and invoke the innate feelings of compunction and humaneness towards the environment. In other words the attitudinal, behavioral and thus discernible shifts in the way we perceive our larger home, the globe, can only be brought if a deep-seated ecologically ingrained poetics that brings the extended family as the planet Earth as one's own. Patrick Gamez writes that, "environmental philosophers have noted that what

we face is a massive collective action problem, exacerbated by numerous factors. The issue is, in effect, a tragedy of the commons, wherein every individual is incentivized to pursue their interests and “free ride” concerning carbon emissions and lifestyle consumption. As with most collective action problems, the issue lies in incentivizing individuals to adopt patterns or strategies of action that - while perhaps not individually optimal - do not lead to the same undesirable collective consequences. The search for some sort of ethical motivation for individuals is urgent not simply because of the looming climate catastrophe” (Gamez, 2018, 191).

### **Existing Curriculum: An Appraisal**

The existing curricula across Indian universities have broadly encompassed aesthetics and writings on the thematic and rhetorical features of environmental literature including Eco-feminism, Eco-criticism, pastoral/nature and ecological non-fiction/fiction, Eco-ethics and philosophy, Green Studies, *Cli-fi*, Oikopoetics, plastic humanities, Himalayan writings/literature, river narratives to name a few. Bringing about the negotiations based on creative and scientific explorations, some of the texts inclusive of stories and novels incorporated in the broader curriculum are: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Edwin Muir’s *Horses*, Chetan Raj Shrestha’s *The King’s Harvest*, Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, Orijit Sen’s *River of Stories* etc; anthology such as Thangjamlbopishak’s *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-east India* ; select poems or poetic texts of Rabindranath Tagore, William Wordsworth, Mary Oliver, Dylan Thomas, Gary Snyder, A.K Ramanujan, Ruskin Bond, K. Satchitanandan, Mamang Dai, Robin Ngangom, Gieve Patel, Rohan Chettri, Santos Perez, translations as *The Sickie*, *Acchev* etc.

The New Education Policy (NEP) by the Cabinet in 2020 has undoubtedly emphasized and brought in the multi-disciplinary approach to curriculum instead of core competencies of various subject matter. Concurrently, there is also a need to incorporate such contents and texts that not only cater to the high sensibilities of perceptual experience regarding the ecosystem but also instil and invoke innate feelings of compunction and humaneness towards the environment. Humanities vis-a-vis poetic articulation has the utmost and transcendental vigour in its ability to shuffle and trans-locate once perspicacity and susceptibility towards their environment. The towering data, methodical results, scientific inspections, summits/meetings/symposiums and even declarations when proven insufficient to adequately address, regulate, negotiate or implement the immediate crisis of the diminishing ecologies, while it is also the time that

poetry, thorough its intuitive and nuanced articulation brings about this planetary consciousness through deeper involvement of troupes and metaphors to forestall the impact that man has done in past in order to knock on one's consciousness. It is also no surprise that literature and its different trajectories have now moved past the bucolic and pastoral eulogium, maudlin and dewy-eyed longing to nature ecologies. The buzzword is anthropocentric/the world is buzzing now with cybernetic and digital realities, cyborgs and technocratic mediums and tools, plastics, plasticity, polymeric and synthetic existence. Among the varied creative and poetic ecological pieces this paper argues and persuades for the need to mainstream Sudeep Sen's *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation*, as part of environmental education and not just those chapters/stories or books and other exegesis on climate damage, issue of climate politics, climate refugees and climate wars, which chart the causalities, situate around the informational latitude. To bring a shift at the emotive and confrontational level it is significant to make them transposed to a grass-root and micro level of adoption and analyse them as part of quintessential textual readings. The text should be seen as performing the hetero-telic function of having a purpose, apart from being itself. It is rather pertinent to re-read the verdict of Marcella Durand (2019) in *The Ecology of Poetry*, writes, "association, juxtaposition, and metaphor are how poets can go further than scientists in addressing systems. The poet can legitimately juxtapose kelp beds with junkyards. Or to get technical, reflect the water reservoir system for a large city in the linguistic structure of repetitive water-associated words in a poem. And poets right now are the only "scientist-artists" who can do these sorts of associations and get away with them—all other disciplines, such as biology, oceanography, or mathematics carry an obligation to separate their ideas into discrete topics. You're not allowed to associate your findings about sea birds nesting on a remote Arctic island with the drought in the West. But as a poet, you certainly can. And you can do it in a way that journalists can't—you can do it in a way that is concentrated, that alters perception, that permanently alters language or a linguistic structure. Because you as poets are lucky enough to work in a medium that not only is in itself an art, but an art that interacts essentially with the exterior world, with things, events, and systems. Through this multi-dimensional aspect of poetry, poets are an essential catalyst for increased perception and increased change" (62).

Anthropocene as the era, has brought about the darker and deterministic forces responsible for the disaster that humanity faces at large today. Classrooms are indeed the dialectical spaces of dialogue, which has the capacity to shape/shift/craft and mould the cognitional discernment of the youth in order to bring them in heightened state of awareness. Instead of the troupes of the absent cultures of nature, the bleak and darker de-



personalisation can assault the interiority and subjectivity of experience and thereby liberate the reader of the sense of trouble created by himself in his universe.

In the current scenario, the higher secondary and secondary education system and curriculum include texts which bring edifying and ontological knowledge about the ecologies, biodiversity and so forth. Thus effective environment education can be materialized only when such subject matter, substance and composition thereby an environmental system is created which can sensitize the people at large at all levels. Just as several other subjects, from “Financial Accounting”, “Jurisprudence”, “Human Rights”, “Drama”, Gender and “Dalit Studies” exist on the curricula spectrum, ecopoetics deserves to receive its due share of its visibility, a phenomenon which are capable of invoking consciousness towards the tiniest bio-diversity or the bionomics of these scientific ecologies that breath around us.

### ***A Case for Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation***

Research in the past, based on various disciplines and epistemic understanding internationally has observed and found for the students or youth “the relationship between their knowledge and attitude towards the environment is a negative, little or no relationship” (Erhabor, 5367). Under ecopoetics and environmental curriculum, anthropocentric literature should be introduced as a structural part of the curricula so that environment and issues of global climate change are not just read to be having ‘activist sensibilities or arm-chair clamour, sitting comfortably in the zones of glass chambers and rubble-walls’ (Arora, 2023, 366). Rather, the calamitous realities of the anthropocentric era which has pushed and created a paradigmatic shift in the scholarly and creative imagination must be studied to understand the starkest, bare-bone human predicaments as a result of climate change. In the current frameworks of the curricula, non-fictional and fictional accounts of ecology, indigenous perspectives on the environment, anthropomorphic connections, technics and environmental justice etc must be apprehended as mainstreamed discourse and seen as creative, hyper-acute perceptual practices of reading and praxis, which leads to an awakened consciousness/an ecological consciousness or conscience towards this planet. Randall (2010) opines, “Poems have been smuggled out of prisons, shared on battlefields, passed from hand to hand and generation to generation, scratched on walls, written in diaries and recipe books, distributed on street corners, and carried cross-county by hobos riding the freight trains of the 1930s. They have inhabited public spaces and been whispered in ears, bringing otherwise indescribable events and people to life in stunning ways. Their humour makes us laugh. Their truth can take

our breath away. Their concise complexity may transmit more, and more powerfully, than any piece of prose. Their ability to evoke emotion often makes them purveyors of experience in ways that more expository writing cannot” (21).

Apropos the collection of poetry *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* by Sudeep Sen, as Carolyn Forché asserts, “. . . is a poet’s report from a collapsing biosphere, summoning human courage to alter course. . .” (*Anthropocene*, 1). As a modern Indian English poet, Sen’s work has captured and recorded remarkable insights into human psyche, for its ability to create splendid images, at once local and cosmopolitan with a wit which is riveting, solemn and dignified. Amid the physical planetary catastrophe and the emotional cacophony of consumer culture with customer-product; user-data; client-vendor interface, climate change and the attack of the recent microbe through the worldwide pandemic, the collection of poems is wrought with the ever-shifting cartographies of one’s emotional landscapes. The poems are not even tamed with rigid conventions of genre and form, the lexicon moves freely from non-fiction to ekphrastic, flash-fiction, to haiku/haibun and hybrid poems. It is not ‘The Westminster Abbey’, ‘The Ganges’ or ‘The Spring’, ‘the snowy evening or clouds, Autumn/soft rains etc. that become the subject matter of the poetic lexicon. It is rather the unseasonal rains, floods, swelled wind waves of oceans devouring the coastal regions, extreme fluctuations in atmospheric temperatures, pressures, heat and cold spikes, polluted air damaging further the comorbidity, parched clouds and droughts that fill the thematic spectrum. A hot stench of climate degradation and a cold stint of air-related troubles the poet’s spirit which burns with the blazing summer of scorching heat and the heart that hardens in the winter coldness of diffidence. The images of extreme heat speak of the new pandemonium created on Earth:

Even stone slow-melts on the over-heated tarmac.  
Smoke emanates from barks/sharply crackling--incipient fire-flurries.  
Looking for cooler earth under tree shade,  
dogs dig deeper/into the dry, thinly available soil. Electrical  
lines overhead glow, rutilant in heat./Sheltering birds ruffle in uneasy agitation. (“Afternoon Meltdown”, 41)

Layers of political resistance are nudged carefully in the silent introspection of the climate anxiety. Reading them can be an eye-opener, almost as a gatekeeper to one’s conscience for cosmic reparation. Sudeep Sen, a poet of the 1990s doesn’t probably forgets his location as a high-ranking poet, a literary geriatric, who would not engage in dilly-dallying of the meaning, creating depths of ambiguous pools of derivation through laboured

and manufactured metaphors. He rather comes straight, words hitting the right chord through directness and explicit, unequivocal frankness. The poet writes:

“My body carved from abandoned bricks of a ruined temple, from minaret-shards of an old mosque,  
from slate-remnants of a medieval church apse, from soil tilled by my ancestors (“Disembodied”, 28).

The sly corruption that has become an everyday living ethos of almost all living creatures, clean hearts and clean air is hard to perceive, “Arrogance, avarice, real estate seduction—sly filial deceit, blighted brick buildings” (“Concrete Graves”, 43). These are no clever play of linguistic games, teasing the reader of some mental gymnastics, vying for the reader’s attention of the cerebral intimacy, it rather establishes itself at an emotional amity, a warmth and belonging of being human first, an inwardness and fellow feeling of speaking for the race. The poet becomes a silent, distant observer, living in the centre but existing on the peripheries that registers the decadence, debauchery and overall debasement of systems and degeneration of human society. Extreme rains find multiple modalities, sometimes as a seducer, a destroyer, a constant interrupter, an interceptor of a “full fury of an unstoppable monsoon” (“Shower”, “Wake”, 47) affecting everything that came in its way-- “weak roofs, power lines, trees, un-warned shelters, people---almost everything (“Shower”, “Wake”, 47). As the weather fluctuates “promiscuously” (*Anthropocene*, 47) “merely nonchalant breathing is a blessing.” (*Anthropocene*, 51) The poet recounts a news broadcast, that plays on repeat the loss, wreckage, and extinction, “Trees uprooted, electric poles down, cars submerged, shanties washed away. In Kolkata’s College Street, soaked pages of books float in anguish” (66).

The evocative renderings of heat such as “furnace hot”( *Anthropocene*, 40), “dry atmosphere simmers, sears scorches” (40), “melting street tarmac” (40), “this city fuming, fulminating, frothing” (40), “Electrical lines overhead glow, rutilant in heat” (41) “heat rises from everywhere--surfaces, terraces, walls, linen, food, water” (41), “No moisture, just steam, heat, heat and more heat. Barren. Everything seems in short supply, except heat.” (38), “Heat--Saturating shrouds brighter” (39) intensify the heat as perceived by the reader to warn of a dystopic and melancholic present of death, decay and apathy. When man dominates over nature, nature’s agitation devours with indomitable swelter and high temperatures.

The linguistic arrangement of the poems with several devices such as cacophony (stray dogs bark, cows groan, loudspeakers bray./On ghat-side walls. . . the business of death being transacted carries on. . . (136), synaesthesia (“Heat outside is like a filigreed sand on my skin” 40), overt asyndeton, (“Death knells peal, numbers multiply,/virus ravages us, one by one,” 55) and occasional polysyndeton, which gives a powerful

rhetoical effect and speaks of the variegated tones and textures to the anxieties, pains and troubles, especially of people with co-morbidity.

The topographical distribution of the three poems “Disembodied” (28); “Disembodied: Les Voyageurs” (129); and “Disembodied 3: Within” (130) exclusively and entirely speak of the local wilderness, using the barren Eliotian *Wasteland* idiom, echoing the emptiness of a putrefied civilization. The poet writes,

“. . . as if eroded by poisoned weather, eaten away by civilizational time— corrosion, corruption, callousness. Power, strength, gravitas residing in metal’s absence. Men-Women, old-young, statuesque— holding their lives in briefcases— incomplete travelers, Marseilles Les voyageurs, parts of their bodies missing— surreal—steadfast, anchored” (129).

The onslaught of synthetic, processed, manufactured and the artificial food, words and memory compensates for this amnesia. The poem becomes a call to re-calibrate the falling moral order and decadence of the civilizational edifice. Digital and virtual is permanently etched in the memory, wiping out all signs of “living” in the moment, seizing *carpe diem*”:

Social media, judge-and-jury—Internet  
debris, a permanent scar. Fake news like  
the coronavirus replicates at an alarming  
level. Multiple pandemics prevail—politics  
of profit and power, mistrust and misuse. (101)  
. . . memory is not an issue, megabytes abound in tiny microchips. (102)

Yet, it is all about memory—real, virtual— “Inscriptions on epitaphs, coded hieroglyphs, ink, text” (75). The poet muffles, and feels repressed and stifled, “We speak in poetic phrases, punctuated by dactyls and trochees, inundating line-breaks with half-rhymes. . . our silent speech stretches— like white, its colors radiating beyond its spectrum-bandwidth” (59).

The linguistic mumbo-jumbo in small digital images through emojis and emoticons, has inklings to speak for the inarticulacy and speechlessness and moved into the taciturnity of social interactions and the breakdown of interrelationship, “We communicate in exclamations, emojis, emoticons— intricacies of words, beauty of language, their epistolary power, lost to texting” (98).

Or when in remorseful introspection the poet wonders, “What convoluted times we live in now, . . . everything is a subterfuge to continue oppressing the subaltern, everything is about power or the lack thereof” (69).

Poetry and art which provide the antidote of the perils and agonies of the past, also become a prognosticator of future of the impending disaster and danger. The poet recollects, “I wish to paint a canvas that invents new indices of pain and water, for anyone who wishes to listen and bear, for anyone who wishes to understand” (*Anthropocene*, 89). The poet further underlines, “It is at such interstices that art and passion find their true shape” (85). The poet of the contemporaries of Kolatkar, Jeet Thayil appears to be on a quest of re-birthing new poetic idioms, new rhythms, and cadences that speak of ecology intertwined with human elementality. The pandemic becomes an remorseful occasion to remind oneself and the reader of the essential ontological (in)securities and precarity that human life comes with, upon a need to emphasize the nature’s colossal power over the determinism and free will of man. Thus, from epistemic discoveries of disillusionment, pain, violence, apathy to the general ontological truths of the nature of being and the meaning of existence, Sen drills the poetic rhythms along with the bio-rhymes of what it means to live and to exist, searching for deep philosophical questions of ingrained with paradoxes aplenty. The gamut of shifts that took place during the pandemic--of distrust, lack of communication, silence, distancing--undergo infinite subversion of meaning.

Anthropocene literature vis-a-vis poetry as part of ecopoetics and as a structural part of the curricula must be read in conjunction with and as intersecting and augmenting the distinctive complexities of class, race, gender, religion and communities. The anthropocenic literature must be read as a creative, hyper-perceptual experience which leads to an awakened consciousness/ an ecological planetary conscience.

### **Conclusion**

In the existing program of studies, this acute exigency of the colossal crisis has not registered itself through poetry while there exists galore of poems/stories that work as ancillary forms of knowledge-apparatuses to the understanding of core subjects. From the romantic idealism of nature to a troubled bond with ecology, anthropocentric writing has come far and wide in terms of its scope and validation. This is not to invalidate the inclusion of nature poets and other writers such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Scott, or other long traditions of pastoral, bucolic or rustic landscape or the theoretical prepositions devoted to the environment which serve as models of rote learning. In other words, the awareness of the environment has come to date as supplementary

forms of scientific and lettered knowledge of phenomenology, but what is needed is how we become the ontological beings under such epistemes. As an appendage to the core curriculum, environment-related activities, awareness programs and other such events momentarily bring about the disastrous consequences of damaging the environment at a tertiary or quaternary level. Environment thus assumes the peripheral role, remains on the margins of the core subjects and exists somewhere betwixt and between the mainstream educational modules.

If the unsung legislature of the world is the poet, then he also becomes the unpretentious preserver and custodian of the ecology. As an unlisted personnel and guardian of ecology, the poet can bring in intuitive and righteous shifts by way of serving some of the hard-hitting, evocative plight of the elements of nature humans and all other biotic lives that suffer today. The ability of poetry to bring about change has been caused by inhibitions with a lot of debates and dialectics around its potentiality of veritable change. Audree Lorde underlines the movement of making revolutions and changes while emphasizing that, “Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into ideas, and then into more tangible action.” (“Poetry is not luxury”, 1977)

The paper, thus, argued and persuaded the need to mainstream creative ecological, anthropocenic pieces and not just those chapters/stories or books and other exegesis on climate damage, which are purely theoretical, fact-based/ or informational. And to bring a shift it is significant to make them transposed to a grass-root and micro level of adoption and analyse them as part of quintessential textual readings.

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## SANITATION WORK IS AN OCCUPATION OR A CASTE IDENTITY IN INDIA?

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### Abstract

*This article argues that sanitation work is an occupation or reflects caste identity. It queries whether sanitation work is inherently designated for a particular caste or if a specific caste is inherently designated for sanitation work. Despite governmental endeavours towards achieving comprehensive sanitation coverage, scant attention has been directed towards mitigating stigma and ameliorating the working conditions of sanitation workers. Sanitation work includes sewage cleaning, street cleaning, septic tank cleaning, railway cleaning, and public toilet cleaning, and often filthy and dangerous working conditions pose potential threats to the lives of those engaged in such occupations. This paper illuminates the intricate interplay between sanitation workers' occupational engagement and the construction of their identity, examining how this identity persists across generations. The formation of identity, a process often taken for granted in societal norms, is explored with a focus on its normalcy. Such indifference contributes to transmitting preconceived identities to successive generations, negatively impacting those who unwittingly embrace these constructed identities.*

**Keywords:** Sanitation Workers, Social Capital, Occupation, Dignity, Identity capital, Caste and Stigma.

### Introduction

Sanitation work in the country is inextricably tied with caste-based occupational roles. Most of such work is done by people from Scheduled Caste communities and Scheduled Tribes in some areas. Over an extended period, those engaged in sanitation face longstanding discrimination, stigma and untouchability—these sanitation workers manually clean sewers, septic tanks, pits and drains. Despite the Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers Act 2013, the practices persist as local government bodies do not directly engage manual scavengers, thus subcontracted to private businesses and informal labourers. According to the Sixth Economic Census in 2013, approximately 82 per cent of businesses in water supply, sewerage, waste management, and remediation activities operate in the private sector.

Workers perform sanitation work called 'Sanitation Workers (Safai Karamcharis)' under filthy conditions. "Safai Karamchari" means a person engaged in, or employed for, manually carrying human excreta or any

sanitation work (National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993). This occupation is one of society's most important jobs, yet they remain unappreciated (Prasad, C. S.). Although the Government merged the Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) with the National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE), justifying the move by saying that manual scavenging no longer takes place in the country and that the goal was now to reduce hazardous cleaning of sewers. The fact is a total of 1,035 people have died while undertaking hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks across India since 1993.<sup>i</sup> The cleaning of sewers, latrines, faecal sludge handling, railways, waste treatment plants, public restrooms, school restrooms, sweeping and drain cleaning, household garbage are the nine general categories of sanitation workers (WaterAid, 2019, p. 3). There are more jobs like handling carcasses, cleaning leather, managing dead bodies and welcome cleaning at childbirth. Apart from their nature of work, it is important to understand that occupation in sanitation work intersects with dirty work and furthers with the identity formation of sanitation workers in society.

### **Intersection of Sanitation Work with Dirty Work and Stigma**

There is an intersection of sanitation work with dirty work. According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999, p. 413) jobs/professions that are viewed as unpleasant, nasty and demeaning – that is, as being physically, socially and morally tainted- are often classified as dirty work. Dirty work has two important dimensions: material and symbolic. The meanings associated with dirt or filth are the main emphasis of the symbolic dimension. Both filth and cleanliness have moral and societal implications. It is possible to argue that society has defined what “dirt” means. The material aspect of dirty work was described by Dant and Bowles (2003, p. 2), including physical sensations of cloggy, smell, touch and slime.

In addition to this, Everett Hughes (1962, p. 3-11) identified that doing dirty work is physically disgusting, goes against moral principles, or is a sign of social humiliation. Moreover, apart from physical stigma, the concept of filth or dirt has moral as well as social blot too. Work that is physically tainted may involve coming into contact with unclean materials such as (e.g. human fluids, sludge and garbage) that is considered offensive in bodily terms through smell and touch. Sanitation workers also deal with dirt, human waste and filthy matter all the time. Their work is also considered dirty and unclean. People do not like to come in contact with sanitation workers because sanitation workers work in poor environments. Not only due to their unclean physical working environment but also due to the stigma of their caste (due to particular caste involved in sanitation work), people maintain distance from them. Volti, R (2012, p. 77) justified how certain occupation-

related words and phrases differentiate a person from others. Sanitation workers have been called by many words like trash man, *bhangi*, *chooda*, *mehtar*, *Jamadar*, *Valmiki* and many more. These words certainly put them in a category which is specific to them only. There is a social stigma attached to the occupation of sanitation workers, which hinders their upward mobility.

The use of language and terms such as sweepers or scavengers itself weakens the dignity of Dalit workers (Thorat, 2009, p. 109). There are different words used for sanitation workers such as halalkhor (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), Pourakarmikas (Bangalore), Beldars and Bhangi (Uttar Pradesh), Jamadar (Punjab), Valmiki (Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab), Mehtar (Uttar Pradesh and Hyderabad), Hadi (Bengal), Chuhra (Punjab), Chamar (Punjab), Arundhatiyars (Tamil Nadu) etc. In India, certain occupations are integrated and associated with specific castes. Symbolic and physical aspects are relevant to understanding the concept of dirty work. Furthermore, sanitation work is associated with the Dalit caste. Control is also exercised on Dalits through a progressive contractualization of work where wages, working conditions, and social security measures are withdrawn.

The abuse that Dalits comprehend is often used as a reason for their oppression and extreme social exclusion. In India, members of Dalit castes have generally been proposed to do dirty and derogatory tasks for higher stratum households (Shah et al., p. 5). Manually cleaning human excreta is considered the ultimate degrading of these tasks. Purity and pollution order prevail even among Dalit castes; communities belonging to castes the one clean human faeces are considered to be utmost polluted and thus are usually even more marginalized than people affiliated with other Dalit castes. The fact that Dalits do 'dirty' work is regularly used as evidence for their perpetual custom pollution, and this has been used as confirmation for forbidding them from schools, public water sources and honourable service.

Today, untouchability and caste-positioned social exclusion are being renegotiated in rural India. The state has classified many of the lowest castes as 'Scheduled Castes' and executed affirmative action policies for members of these castes to have admittance to academic institutions and employment in public places. The exclusion of Dalits from public places and water sources is less prevalent than it was previously, but it is still prevalent for caste Hindus, who are not from one of the untouchable castes, to refuse to accept foodstuff or take water from the households of Dalits and to forbid pariah from temple structures. An essential part of Dalits' struggle for egalitarianism has been withdrawing from the degrading tasks accompanying untouchability (Shah et al., 2006, p. 157). A stratum Hindu can contract an illness as a social consequence if

he or she is seen doing untouchable tasks (Ali, 2002, p.599).

When stigma<sup>ii</sup> is associated with work and caste, then people are judged based on their caste, not based on their skills. Caste is a complex social and psychological construct. According to Gorringer and Rafanell (2007, p. 97), there are three critical dimensions of caste - (1) social hierarchy, in which status is privileged over power and economic wealth; (2) endogamous separation, whereby inter-marriage between castes and close social interaction are considered as a taboo and (3) an interdependent division of labour. Over the years, different categories of people have been employed in relation to their caste. The Scheduled Caste people were previously referred to as the 'Untouchables', as they were widely considered to be 'impure' and continue to be exposed to social stigma. Within the category of Schedules Caste, there exists a hierarchy of caste groups; for instance, the Valmiki are considered to be more socially disadvantaged than the Ravidasis (chamars). The concept of stigma is valuable for understanding how caste identity affects people's lives. According to Erving Goffman (2009, p. 2), stigma is an uncommon relationship between attribute and stereotype. According to Croker, Major and Steele (1998, p. 504) - 'a person who is stigmatized is a person whose social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity—the person is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others'. Also, Stigma consists of recognizing differences based on a negative distinguishing characteristic of one's social identity and the consequent devaluation and dehumanization of the individual group member (Jaspal, R., 2011, p. 27).

In India, some informal labour has been devoted to the traditional occupation system based on the hierarchical caste structure. Hence, occupations are divided as per castes in India. Lower caste, specifically, Dalit's traditional occupation has been considered worthless, dirty and filthy in a society and it further constructs stigma with their caste identity. Moreover, a particular kind of labour like a manual scavenger, rag picker, and sanitation worker (Safai Karamchari) has been associated with a particular type of perception which produces a vocabulary with damaging concepts like injustice, humiliation, indignity, and disrespect (Kumar, A, 2020, p. 10228 ). The stigmatized caste system in India remains to be the key determinant of the destiny of these workers. As a result, some communities, majorly 'Dalits' are compelled to perform these tasks, which are not just hazardous and stigmatizing but also paid less. Dalits traditionally involve polluted, dirty or filthy labour such as scavenger, leather, and waste. This not only makes their identities confined to the work they are involved in but also pushes them to accept the burden of inheritance, stigma and exploitation as social capital. Specific cultural and social values are deeply attached to sanitation work.

Moreover, negative approaches have been constructed towards those working with waste (waste picker, manual scavenger, rag picker etc.). In India, those who are working with waste have been stigmatized and placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In their study on waste and waste workers, Devi, Swamy and Nilofer, 2016, p. 5504) argued that a rag picker plays an essential role in waste management, but they remained unrecognizable in society and other institutions.

### **Identity Construction of Sanitation Workers**

The process of identity construction starts initially; one needs to look at the cognitive version of identity formation. The cognitive version includes self-schema, which refers to how much knowledge one has organized about oneself. The social version of self-schema is 'Group Schema', which includes information about social positions and stratification statuses. Because the social position that one occupies has a direct impact on one's sense of self. So, group schema plays a vital role in identity formation. According to Tajfel and Turner (2004, p. 276), social identity theory focuses on how individuals identify themselves regarding group memberships. Deaux (1993, p. 4) states that social and personal identities are inseparable, with a continuous interplay between them.

On the other hand, symbolic interactionists focus on the structure of identity and the processes and interactions through which identities are formed. Antaki et al. (1996, p. 473) used conversational analysis to explain how identities change as interaction proceeds. Society plays an essential role in the identity formation process. The kind of social group which one joins decides one's value in the social stratum. It is also relevant in the case of identity formation of sanitation workers. They have already been suffering from indifferent behaviour by society due to their lower caste and lower position in the social stratum. Self-schema and group schema both play essential roles in their identity formation. Sanitation workers consider themselves as 'less than' the other social groups. The whole process of identity formation forms their perception of themselves.

The literature described how the stigma has been attached to sanitation work. It is considered derogatory and scheduled caste, and tribes have been supposed to do it because of their caste. The stigma attached to sanitation work, as well as workers, has a direct impact on the reconstruction of their social capital and identity. Social identity is when an individual reframes his identity in terms of others' identities. Thus, sanitation workers put themselves in the category which is considered relevant to them according to society. The stigma attached to sanitation workers reduces equality and opportunities for interpersonal interaction between sanitation workers and other members of society. Sanitation workers work at dawn so that their identity cannot be revealed in

society. A weak social capital leads to undesirable behaviour by the members of society. Hence, the stigma and unequal behaviour against sanitation workers completely negatively reconstruct their social capital.

### **Impact of Conception of Socially Constructed Identity**

The unwitting embrace of preconceived identities among successive generations of sanitation workers can have multifaceted detrimental impacts. Firstly, it perpetuates social stratification and reinforces caste-based discrimination, as individuals are constrained by societal expectations and norms associated with their predetermined identities. This can result in limited opportunities for upward mobility and socioeconomic advancement, further entrenching societal inequities.

Moreover, internalizing these constructed identities may engender feelings of self-deprecation, shame, and marginalization among sanitation workers. Such negative self-perceptions can undermine their sense of self-worth and diminish their aspirations, potentially leading to psychological distress and reduced well-being.

Additionally, the perpetuation of caste-based identities within the sanitation workforce perpetuates societal perceptions of these occupations as inherently low-status and undesirable. This, in turn, may deter individuals from outside the caste group from pursuing careers in sanitation, perpetuating the cycle of marginalization and limiting workforce diversification.

Overall, the unwitting embrace of constructed identities among sanitation workers perpetuates social inequalities and undermines individual dignity, psychological well-being, and opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.

### **Challenges in Sanitation Work**

The most challenging part of sanitation work is recognising the number of workers and actual occupational death.

Over the past five decades, India has witnessed an estimated million uncounted deaths of sanitation workers while handling dead bodies during the peak of the pandemic's second wave, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas and on the banks of the Ganga in cities like Buxar, Ballia, Kannauj, Allahabad, and Unnao. Over the past five years, more than 9,730 individuals have succumbed to chronic conditions related to manual scavenging and insanitary latrine cleaning. Additionally, over 600 deaths have been attributed to hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning, with a significant portion of cases going unreported, estimated at around 18-

20 per cent. The failure to accurately estimate the number of sanitation worker deaths underscores systemic deficiencies in implementing the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act and related governmental interventions. Despite appeals from manual scavengers to municipal and rural authorities for identification and rehabilitation, shortcomings persist at both urban and rural levels. This lack of recognition exacerbates states' reluctance to acknowledge the prevalence of manual scavenging and undertake necessary measures to eliminate unsanitary practices and hazardous cleaning procedures. District magistrates' non-compliance with statutory obligations, alongside inadequacies in inspectorial oversight of sanitation infrastructure, further exacerbate these systemic failures (Akhilesh, 2021).

The Government's failure to expand the categories of manual scavengers—excluding dry latrine workers, drain sweepers, septic tank cleaners, and railway sanitation workers, and encompassing sanitary toilet cleaners, open faecal sludge handlers, hospital sanitation workers, sanitation-waste intersection workers, bone scavengers, etc.—reflects a backward step. This oversight neglects to acknowledge that sub-castes of the Dalit community are predominantly involved in these unclassified sanitation occupations, often involving manual scavenging. The Government's identification-related surveys have covered only 5 per cent of the manual scavenger population and 20 per cent of India's geographical area.

In 2005, the Government of India established the National Health Mission (NHM) to strengthen health care and sanitation. India has gained fast progress in ending open defecation across the country, which has enormously impacted improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WHO, 2018). In 2015, approximately half of India's population of (568 million people suffered the indignity of defecating in fields, forests, bodies of water, or other public spaces due to lack of access to toilets. India alone represented 90% of the people in South Asia and half of the 1.2 billion people in the world that defecated in the open. Through the Swachh Bharat Mission (2014), the number of people without access to toilets has decreased significantly by an estimated 450 million. SDG 6 (Sustainable Development Goal) ensures inclusive access to clean water and sanitation facilities. There are various schemes of the Central Government of India to improve water and sanitation like – Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), National Water Policy (2012), Swachh Bharat Mission (2014), National Urban Sanitation Policy, National sanitation Rating of Cities etc. Since the launch of SBM, the Indian Government has built 1007.98 Lakh toilets in rural areas. During this period, 699 Districts, 2, 58, 657 Gram Panchayats and 5, 99,963 villages declared ODF (Yojana, November 2019). The sub-goal of SDG 6 is to improve sanitation, including Solid Waste Disposal, access to water for toilets, wards having access to

liquid waste disposal for community and public toilets, etc.

All these efforts are made to access clean water and sanitation, but negligible efforts have been made to improve the living and working conditions of those who provide us basic sanitation facilities, i.e., sanitation workers. SDG 8 deals with Decent Work for all and Sustainable Economic Growth. One cannot achieve SDG 6 at the cost of SDG 8.

Sanitation workers deal with human waste and all other sanitation work under filthy and unhealthy conditions. They have to face many occupational health hazards while working, which can cost their health and life. There are around 5 million people employed in sanitation work of different kinds in India, and about 2 million are working in high-risk conditions (Dalberg Associates, 2017<sup>iii</sup>). Specific categories of sanitation workers must work long hours and get no surplus wages for extra work. They often have to bear the stigma of offensive and unclean work. There is a high chance of accidental deaths in certain types of sanitation work, such as sewage cleaning. According to the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Report, 631 people died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks since 2010 (Indian Express, September 20th, 2020). According to the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Annual Report (2018 – 19), the total number of sewer deaths from 1993 to 2019 was 774. Indian Government and other institutions have put their continuous efforts into protecting the dignity and rights of sanitation workers. In a nutshell, sanitation workers risk their lives to provide services to the people, but they have to work under poor working conditions, which can cost their lives. Without an adequate sanitation system and the non-availability of mechanized equipment for emptying and cleaning waste, sanitation workers can be vulnerable.

According to the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Annual Report, 2018 – 19, the number of sewer deaths from 1993 to 2018 in India was 711, and there were 63 from 2018 to 19. However, numerous cases are unreported.

The actual number of deaths of sanitation workers is as much a secret as the data on the number of individuals engaged in sanitation work or, on the other hand, manual scavenging. National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK, 2019) revealed that at least 50 sanitation workers have died cleaning sewers in the first six months of 2019 alone (Nair, 2022, p. 332). In India, from 2017 to 2018, one sanitation worker died every five days (Nair, 2018). In India between, 2016 and November 2019, 282 sanitation workers lost their lives while clear-out septic tanks and sewers, according to the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE). Tamil Nadu had the largest number of deaths (40), followed by Haryana with 31 deaths in manholes (Desai,



D., 2020). It is crystal clear that sanitation workers struggle to make ends meet and deals with everyday troubles.

## **Conclusion**

The demand for sanitation work was a never ending. This has already been growing due to urbanization, and successful construction of toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission. The flagship programme has led to erecting toilets with on-site sanitation systems such as septic tanks and pits in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. In addition to this, there was also an emphasis on more extensive sanitation infrastructure such as sewerage networks, sewerage treatment plants and faecal sludge treatment plants through the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation. With the inadequate sewerage network and treatment plants, the safe treatment and disposal of waste lags behind toilet construction. Much of the demand for desludging and other sanitation services is met through private vacuum truck operators known to flout the ban on manual scavenging and violate safety standards. However, given the extent of informality in the sector, it is challenging to estimate the number of manual scavengers and sanitation workers accurately.

Thus, we humans need basic hygiene and sanitation services for healthy living, and sanitation workers provide sanitation services. They not only face problems due to inadequate and unhealthy working conditions/environment but also due to financial insecurity, social stigma, discrimination, bad /derogatory behaviour by people etc. Their work has been associated with 'Dirty Work'. One of the most vulnerable works is sewage cleaning. With the knowledge of their challenging occupation (chronic occupational illness and health), the stakeholders and society created the occupational identity of sanitation workers as a permanent marker. This identity formation of sanitation workers intersects with caste, matrimonial, education and status systems. Thus, it is a question for the present society to decide whether a person's occupation will become their caste or their caste will be associated with that particular occupation.

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<sup>i</sup> The Social Justice Ministry informed Lok Sabha on March 14 (2023).

<sup>ii</sup> Stigma can be explained as a process of dehumanizing, degrading, discrediting and devaluing people in certain population groups, often based on a feeling of disgust/hatred.

<sup>iii</sup> The Sanitation Workers Project was 5-month long study of sanitation workers across India carried out by Dalberg Advisors in 2017, with the support of The Gates Foundation. Retrieved from <http://sanitationworkers.org>

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## **Satra and Women: Striving for equilibrium between conventionality and inclusiveness.**

**Bidisha Pator**

### **Abstract**

*The scholarly paper analyzes and explores the historical backdrop surrounding the establishment of the Satra Institution in Assam, as well as its role in perpetuating societal gender norms and patriarchal power dynamics. Historically, the Satra Institution had restricted women's involvement, but with evolving societal perspectives, there is now a discourse on inclusivity and gender parity.*

**Keywords-** Assam, Conventionality, Equality, Inclusiveness, Satra and Women

### **Introduction**

“One of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellence and to realize its limitation is the study of the history of position and status of women in it”- Altekari.

Neo-Vaishnavism flourished at times when Saivism and Shaktism were glorified in Assamese society. Assam in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed a growth of the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition initiated by Sankardeva (1449-1568), the founder of the reformed sect. His major teachings on- the eradication of rituals and practices, rejection of caste distinction, and complete surrender to one Supreme God- Visnu or Krishna, popularized the tradition itself (Nath,2011:38). Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam perpetuates the relation of the servant to his master as a model, where the servants are the devotees and the master is the Supreme god (Cantlie, 1984:257).

Satras and Namghars, being a larger institution trace their origin to the philosophical understanding of Sankardeva. Women are active participants in such institutions of society, involving themselves in various organizations like the ‘gopinis committee’ and ‘mahila samiti’ where the issues concerning women are brought up, such as discussions on maternal health, government schemes, projects under bank loans, etc. However, the Studies Research Centre of Gauhati University reveals that women in Assam are generally not a part of the decision-making process in the Naamghar. They do not have any priestly role to begin with, no prominent position, and were always seen standing behind men even in the case of congregational prayers (Dutta,2017:52). It is important to remember that the bhakti or the neo-Vaishnava religion is founded on patriarchal principles. This system has historically kept women in a subordinate position through various means. Such practices are upheld

through a set of moral principles and guidelines outlined by the religious sect, which served to limit and control women, compelling them to embrace subordination (Nath, 2009-10:330).

### **Satras in Medieval Assam: Establishment and Tradition:**

The 'Ekeswarbad' or the monolithic ideology of believing and praying to one God in Neo-Vaishnavism has its roots in the Vedic system of Indian religion. Neo-Vaishnavism though stood out from the old Vedic-Brahminic divinities, yet isn't monotheistic in complete form because of Hinduism's ancient traditions of polytheism, rather set up a monolatri form, where Visnu is considered as the Supreme God while not denying the existence of other gods but undermining it. Henotheism, a term coined by Max Muller might be somewhat preached in Neo-Vaishnavism in which many gods coexist with a supreme God. Monolatri is another word meaning "Worship of One God to exclusion of all others without necessarily denying the existence of the latter." (Phukan, 2016:17). But why was Visnu considered as the Supreme God in Neo-Vaishnavism that was once considered a minor god in the Vedas? Such questions propose to people's strong belief system regarding Visnu as a friendlier and kinder god, Krishna and Ram also became interchangeable with Visnu. Such monolatri predisposition is perfectly displayed in Sankardeva's 'Haramohan' poem. In the poem, Siva i.e. Hara, being a Hindu God, acknowledges Visnu as the Supreme Godhead and that nothing exists except as part of Visnu (Tumi paramatman jagatara is ek, eko bastu nahikoi tohmata vitirek).

Satras initially did not have a physical structure as it is seen in present times, not until the period of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Satra as a term, originates from the Sanskrit term sattra. In the realm of Sanskrit literature, the term has been employed with dual connotations. Initially, it denoted an almshouse, and subsequently, it signified a ritualistic offering extending from a brief period to potentially over a year. This term also played a pivotal role in naming the Vaishnavite establishment in Assam. The word's etymological significance, suggesting an alliance or a congregation (derived from 'sad + tra') or a tool aiding in the liberation of the virtuous (stemming from 'sat + trai'), further solidified the concept of satra (Sarma,1966:144). Within the Bhagavata-Purana, the term sattra was utilized to refer to an extensive session of recitation and elucidation of the entire Bhagavata-Purana by Suta-Ugrasrava to the gathered sages in the Nimisa forest. This tradition of recitation and attentiveness to the preacher of Neo-Vaishnavism by the adherents potentially contributed to the origination of the term sattra in Assam (Nath,2011:41).

The early stage of Satra's evolution began with Sankardeva himself where he preached his teachings among his devotees in a prayer hall (gathering of people in one place). Sankardeva's Satra comprised of just a few huts and a prayer hall for devotees. The existence of the sanctum sanctorum- shrine (manikut) is doubtful. For instance, the early biographies before the 17<sup>th</sup> century mainly Ramacarana and Bhusana Dvija did not mention the existence of manikut but later biographies mainly Katha-Gurucarita, state the presence of manikut. The second phase of satra evolution took a monastic form as these were particularly shaped by the presence of two celibates. It was through the disciples of Sankardeva, mainly Damodardeva, and Madhavadeva that satra evolved into a formal structure. Damodardeva's Vaikunthapura Satra and Patbausi Satra are of utmost importance, consisting of a prayer hall, a manikut, and, four rows of huts (cari-hati) that were designed through carvings in the walls of the Satra. According to Katha-Gurucarita, the satra at Barpeta that has been built by Madhavadeva is said to be influenced by the Patbausi Satra of Damodardeva. Thus, the final structure of the satras was shaped with a prayer hall (namghar) and a shrine (manikut), which sometimes contained the idol of Vishnu or Krishna and sacred text (Sarma, 1966:143).

With the death of Sankardeva, satras of the after period are split into four Samhitas (order)- Brahmo Samhati, Nika Samhati, Purusa Samhati, and Kal Samhati and are grounded on the four elementary principles of Naam, dev, guru, and bhakta. These four Samhatis sketch their source to mythological devotees akin to Brahmo Samhati from Brahma, Nika from Narada, Purusa from Mahadeva, and Kala from Ananta altogether. Because of the rise in number, satras were further split into four types. No female is permitted to reside within the Satra in case it's a monastic one, except on religious grounds. Then there are also Satras, where the Satradhikar and his disciples on top live with women and children. The third type is where the Adhikara remain unmarried but don't detach themselves fully from the family. The last one is the commixture of the first and second types, where the Adhikara is wedded but their devotees correspond to both celibates and non-celibates. There are additionally more than nine hundred satras in the present time, and there are also as many satras that are regarded as utmost importance where their decisions and opinions are considered to be superior and better than the rest of the Satras. These are- Dakshinpat, Garamur, Kuruwabahi, and Auniati of Brahma Samhati; Kowamara, Narowa, Dighali, Bardowa and Camaguri of the Purusa Samhati; Kamalabari and Barpeta of the Nika Samhati. The satras are generally looked after by the different people and positions assigned to them in the form of a ranking. These institutional forms that Satras took played a major part in impacting the decision-making order and pressing issues of the everyday lives of Assamese society (Sarma, 1966:160-162).



Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism was a religion for the ordinary people who carried the gist of understanding about God, rather than targeting the Brahmachari and Sannyasin. The followers of this sect are required to refrain from practices of self-mortification, self-deprivation, and self-indulgence. Assamese Vaishnavas have traditionally adopted a moderate approach in this regard. "A celibate devotee should be a tight-rope walker balancing his way between the twin abysses of laxity and excessive austerity" (Lekhuru, 1952 reprint 1964: 42).

Assamese Vaishnavism consists of two phases of the religious pyramid - one is 'sarana' (formal entry into Vaishnavism) and another is 'Bhajana' (confirmed devotees knowing deeper mysteries of the cult). The whole program of namaprasanga i.e. the chanting of prayers to the complement of musical tools, singing of songs and hymns, and reciting and explaining of the Gita and the Bhagavata are performed in morning, afternoon, and evening sessions of every Satra (Neog, 2021:377). Besides cultural activities like dance, music, and dramas, some of the important milestones achieved through Neo-Vaishnavism are the upliftment of backward classes, fighting caste discrimination, taking a firm stance against blood sacrifices, and empowerment of women by some religious heads like Pitambar Deva Goswami. Unlike the modern idea of maintaining separation between matters of the spiritual and material world, Satra worked to establish a link between the two (ibid.:368). These institutions always had a close linkage with the political system which resulted in the Satradhikar, the head of the religious community enjoying excessive power in the region. Two of the great incidents in the history of the Moamariya rebellion and the fight against British invasion are sufficient cases to determine the political strength of the Satra institution. Religious heads like Pitambar Deva Goswami fought against the British invasion and marched on a journey to establish a casteless society. His stance against sati, child marriage, and polygamy was something imagined beyond his times. He initiated a religious function to celebrate the campaign for the removal of the caste system by organizing putula nritya (doll dance) which thereafter became a popular dance form (Hazarika, 2023:92-101).

#### Position of Women in Satra Institution

The central concern for 1970s feminism was that of religion and religious ideas that established itself as a groundwork for the way the patriarchal society regarded women. The literature of the second-wave feminists identified religion as woman-hating ideologies and opposed and rejected religion altogether (Jeffreys,2012:16). The available works point to the fact that women's exclusion from religion was mainly because they were

considered unclean and impure throughout history. One such example is of an Australian man who killed his wife just because he had touched her blanket while she was on her period (Altekar,2016:194).

The only religion and dharma for women converted into that of 'Pativrata' and her only duty was unquestioning obedience to her husband. In Manu-Samhita, Manu deprived women of their freedom of movement. According to him, a woman as a child, wife, and in old age should be always under the shadowing of her father, husband, and son (Manu Samhita, IX.3.). In the 'Sabha Parva' of the Mahabharata, there is an interesting passage during Yudhisthira's "Rajasuya" sacrifice when he distributed along with cows, grains, gold and "beautiful slim-lined young women". Even Rama Chandra, the wise, who is worshipped as a destroyer of the evil-doers was not devoid of male chauvinism. He did not consider his Pativrata wife Sita as an individual made of flesh and blood but as his personal property. Thus, he says, "Bharata desires then I will renounce kingdom. Sita, my life and property- I offer all these to him". During the Agnipariksha, Rama said to Sita at her first public appearance "Sita, I have fought the battle not because of you but for the preservation of the great Surya clan. You can walk in any direction which you prefer, but you are no longer required for me (Sengupta, 1992:87-88).

Sankardeva, being a great reformer himself, was doubtful about the independent being of women. The passage of Rukmini Haran Kavya's quote that- "Swavabata tiri jati nohe swatantari" and "Kalita Haibek lokastrir oaradahin", meaning independence is not the nature of women and that in the Kali Yoga men will be submissive to women. Vaisnava reformers also advised avoidance of woman's company to their disciples, who were considered as sources of temptation. Verse 18 of the Hara Mohan Kirtana: "Gor nari-sarva mayate kutchit/Mahasidha muniro katakshe hare chit/ Darashana dare saba tapa japa bhanga/ Hena jan Kaminir Gyaneye ere sanga", meaning that the illusion of women is most bizarre. The mind of the great sages is also stirred by them and their reparation is broken at the sight of them. Having been aware of their lust, the wise avoid their company. In the sixth Skanda of the Bhagavatha, it is stated that "A man who believes in a woman is bound to be deemed like an ignorant insect falling into the fire. Again, somewhere cows and women are said to belong to the same race. Aniruddhadeva, who composed the fifth skanda of the Bhagavatha remarks that giving service to Mahantas is the gateway to salvation, but the path to hell is the company of a female friend. In the patriarchal society of the Vaishnava period, Rasalila lost its magical aspect and women began to be seen as lustful commodities. Sankardeva condemned the gopinis or the female companions as adulterous (ibid,90-91).

On the one hand, there is a greater number of female worshippers within the Satra institution participating in namaprasanga at a non-institutional level. Still, on the other hand, there is only a countable number of women participating in leadership roles, which ultimately does not portray women in a much respectable position. Often women's positive beliefs are overshadowed by the negative. Impurity or pollution is often associated with menstruation and childbirth, where a woman, apart from menstruation, is kept separately for many days even after childbirth. In many places in India, it is also observed that the number of days a woman would be kept separately after childbirth depends on whether a boy or girl is born, for boys a lesser number of days, contrary to girls for which a mother is being kept isolated (Joseph, 2020:141).

The actual orthodoxy of liberal Vaishnavism is revealed when menstruation becomes the reason for limiting access to women's entry into the famous religious center of Barpeta. Gender equality in societies where patriarchal values are of much importance, the activities and movement of women of the upper as well as the lower classes are placed under the control of men, in contrast to the tribal societies, where freedom of movement and equal participation in the workplace is enjoyed by women. Matrilineal descent is often associated with food-gathering and hoe cultivation which becomes natural for women to have an important role, hence in such societies, there is also the custom of tracing lineage through the mothers. By contrast, patrilineal descent is associated with the hunting tribes, where the male members of the family practice headhunting. In such societies, it becomes a natural custom to trace lineage through the fathers. Though only the Khasis and Garos among the Northeastern tribes retain the system of matrilineal descent, some like the Dimasas, Karbi, and Kuki still follow a double line of descent, the sons following the father's lineage, the daughters the mothers. Although there is no indication for associating the matriarchal society with the goddess cult, however, the worship of female goddesses can point to a society where women may have a greater privileged position. As Lakshminath Bezborouh calls the religion of Bhakti 'the religion of love and devotion', that was rightfully portrayed by Sankardeva on the grounds of manipulation and reconstruction of gender roles, by advocating the relation of slave to master as similar to man's relation to God, subject towards the king, servant towards lord and wife towards husband that became the ideal mode for all human relations (Mahanta, 1992:99-100).

### **Satra as Gendered Space: Purity and Impurity**

It is unlikely to assume that Neo-Vaishnavism does not provide a space for women, rather it provides a separate sphere for both males and females. For instance, the household is considered a divine space for women but for

men, it is a site of illusion that needs to break away to achieve redemption. This marks the separation of the formal sphere of religion from the household. Religion becomes an end in itself and not just an aide of the household life. However, there is always a dominance of one space, mostly the space of men that take the important positions and even the decisions for women. Contrary to it, given the political, social, and economic situation before Neo-Vaishnavism, Sankardeva is believed to have uplifted women's status which is rightfully justified in many of his works. For instance, in the poem 'Rukmini Haran Nat', Sankardeva not only portrays the 'Mohini' image of a woman but also narrates the greatness of women, where he also gives exposition to Rukmini as a determined woman like a woman in the present society with great mental qualities. In another example, Sankardeva directed Madhavadeva to write the famous work 'Janma-Rahasya' (The Mystery of Birth), for the benefit of women in general (Rajkhowa, 2012:244-245).

In the matter of initiation in Satras, it is believed that one can be a true devotee only when one is initiated (taking shelter under a guru). It is a tradition amongst the Assamese society for the boys to be initiated under a guru of any satras they choose before marriage. To initiate is to surrender to the four principles- naam, dev, guru, and bhakta. A presence of hierarchy is to be found between those who are initiated and those who are not. The one who is initiated never accepts the food prepared by the non-initiated ones. there is a presence of hierarchy between man and the divine itself, where the prasad offered to God are made with much more purity than the ones made for ordinary men. A girl after her first menstruation becomes impure and no respected person shall accept food prepared by her. it is only after her marriage, that she can be initiated. However, in some satras, it is said that woman cannot take saran(initiation) as she regards her husband as her god. It can simply be called 'approaching the guru' or 'paying respect to the Gosain'. In the words of Sankardeva, 'Without a guru, you cannot enter into my religion' (Cantlie, 1984:157-161). Even if, women too can be initiated (saran) in certain Satras, the head, i.e. the Satradhikar while initiating them is not permitted to look at the appearance of a woman by custom, thereby conducting it from behind a purdah. Though both men and women may receive saran from a guru, institutionalized renunciation is available to celibate men only (Sarma, 1966:196). In such a scenario, what can women be truly called devotees to Assamese Vaishnavism needs to be questioned and challenged.

The highest state of being impure is often allied with women's menstruation in religious institutions. On one hand, the propitiousness of menstrual blood is celebrated in Indian culture even today, especially in temples like Devi temple in Chengannur, Kerala, and the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, Assam, where the menstrual cloth is given to devotees as a prasad. On the other, it acts as the very limitation of providing access to the holiest part of

a temple. The menstruation process tends to create more positive charged ions/atoms and can also attract ions from those non-menstruating. In such a situation, the person who is not menstruating suffers from a loss of electrons that might risk oxidative stress. Therefore, it is usually suggested to take a bath in case there is contact because water in motion is said to produce negative ions and is a good way to regain the loss of electrons. It is due to this reason that women who are menstruating are restricted from coming in contact with those who are not, as it is highly pure rather than impure. Even modern medicine has recognized the utility of menstrual blood. The blood when banked before the age of 35 (pre-menopause), has the potential to be used in therapies requiring stem cells as the stem cells from the menstrual blood are regenerative, can multiply rapidly, and flow new cells and tissues (Joseph, 2020:134-135).

The principle of ritual purification becomes of utmost importance to satras mainly those that are monastic in nature. Madhavadeva, one of the disciples of Sankardeva as well as a great reformer of Neo-Vaishnavism, brought with him the principle of purity and pollution, making a strict demarcation between the domain of the household and the domain of religion. Through the ritual purity within the household, the kitchen became the temple for women where she served her god, her husband, and her children. Maintenance of the sattvic (purity) principle within the household had been followed by Sankardeva's wife on the advice of Madhavadeva after a great debate. The concept of purity and pollution strengthened giving rise to misogynist tendencies through the Satras and Naamghars. This kind of judgment is believed to be envisaged in the idea of Neo-Vaishnavism where an ideal woman is portrayed as one that would be devoted to her husband like a man devoted to God. Similarly, a man is often envisaged as a 'purush', a gentler type of manhood than the rude unformed beings living an existence close to that of a 'pashu', animal-like. Such ideology not only domesticates women but also men, making them amenable to social discipline and control (Mahanta, 2016:116-120).

The political voice belongs to men in the public sphere of all naamghars, meaning naamghar being a gendered space is wrong for it is the only male voice that matters. There is no gendered exclusion in the sense that women in different naamghar have been seen accepting the male voice or as the assumed community voice for all. Apart from their shared devotion, women also gather and bond over naamghars for shared and collective emotions, of somewhere belonging together. For instance, in satras like Damodardeva Satra Namghar, women bond over their shared presence in the public space, in Silphukhuri Mahila Naamghar, women form connections based on their shared heritage, whereas, at Mathgharia Sri Nagar, women unite over the opportunity it provides for leisure from

monotonous routines. This environment evolves into a realm of heightened prestige and empowerment for them (Kakoty, 2015:87-89).

The intermixing of women with men is strictly prohibited in the teachings of Sankardeva as he was against unholy 'asakati' (attachment) and not because he considered women inferior. The type of practice that was followed during Tantricism was that of sexual rituals, which Sankardeva was completely against as it exploited women sexually in the name of religion. The harm behind such intermixing is described with the example of how Madhavadeva was nearly arrested for using girl dancers in his Satra. King Raghudev Narayan spared his life only when knowing that those dancers were males dressed as girls in his satra at Ganak-Kuchi. When speaking about the passive participation of women, it is the women themselves who have sometimes given the authority to men to decide about Satra's management, and by will the girls and women are seen learning and singing the 'Bargits' (Rajkhowa, 2012: 234-241).

"So long as the public/private split is respected, women's equality will be notional rather than actual" (Cook, 2006:192). In a secular country like India, secularism is an unspoken separation of the public sphere of the state and the private sphere of religion that becomes very challenging for the interest of women as they are usually confined within the private domain. Secular individuals may not always align with feminist ideologies, and nations that adhere to secular principles may demonstrate antipathy toward women's concerns (Jeffreys,2012:191). The teachings that Sankardeva provided in an open space under a tree to his followers have now been confined through walls, and it is in the later stage that the very impression of 'space' began to trouble itself.

### **Conclusion:**

Satra being an institution itself plays a greater role in the Assamese society. Its influence is limited not only to the religious sphere but also to the fields of music, art, and dance. In such a scenario, representation in the Satra Institution turns out to be a great deal of event, as with its position and power, changes can be brought to the society as a whole. But, often the question of Satra recognizing gender equality is questionable for its principle of providing limited access to women in the naamghar or to the holy shrine of the Satra Institution. Though progress has been made, gender equality within Satras remains a work in progress. A larger inclusion can be brought into society not simply by power and education but by self-awareness and the desire to be documented and comprised.

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## **An Unresolved History: Partition, Immigration Politics and Contestations Over Citizenship in Assam**

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### **Abstract**

*The Partition of India, 1947 is one of the remarkable events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which distinctly influenced and shaped the destiny of South Asia. The Partition scheme was formalized through the bifurcation of Bengal and Punjab on communal lines, along with referendums in Sylhet and NWFP to decide their fates. Partition experience in Assam is linked with Sylhet Referendum which was organized to decide whether, in the event of India's Partition, Sylhet would remain in Assam vis-à-vis India or merge with East Pakistan. The referendum mandated the transfer of Sylhet to East Pakistan except three and a half police station areas. The transfer of Bengali majority Sylhet district which was a bone of contention since colonial period, temporarily brought relief to the local people of Assam; however, huge inflow of refugees mainly Hindu Bengalese consequent upon Partition revived the latent fear of Bengali domination among the latter thereby leading to a very critical situation in Assam over the years. Hence, unlike the rest of the country, Partition in Assam is still unresolved which has brought in its trail several unresolved issues. In this backdrop, the present paper seeks to discuss the politics of immigration issue in Assam in the post-independence period; and thereby analyze the resultant contestations over citizenship in Assam and its effects on the people. Required data and information for the study has been collected from secondary sources.*

*Keywords: Partition, Assam, immigration, refugee, citizenship, politics.*

### **Introduction**

The Partition of India in 1947 was a watershed and, indeed, a defining moment in the history of India which distinctly influenced and shaped the destiny of South Asia. The Partition of India marked the end of almost two centuries of British rule in India and ushered in an era of independence for India. But on the other side, the tragic Partition led to the breaking up of undivided India and formation of two separate and independent dominions- India and Partition followed by communal violence on mass scale and untold misery for the

affected people. It is well known that the Partition of India was formalized mainly through a bifurcation of the two provinces-Bengal and Punjab on communal lines. In addition, the Mountbatten Plan provided for holding of referendums in Sylhet and North West Frontier Province to decide their fates. With regard to Assam, the Partition experience is linked with the Sylhet Referendum which was organized in 1947 to decide whether, in the event of India's Partition, Sylhet would remain in Assam vis-à-vis India or merge with East Pakistan. In this context, it may be noted that Sylhet, a Bengali majority district of Assam which was historically, linguistically and ethnically an integral part of Bengal was amalgamated with Assam in 1874, when the latter was constituted into a Chief Commissioner's province. The colonial administration through the territorial reorganization, tagged revenue-rich Sylhet district with Assam in order to make the depopulated province of Assam more populous and, most importantly, to make the new province financially viable. However, since inception, the Bengali majority Sylhet district was a bone of contention as the English educated Bengali people posed challenge to the existing populace of Assam particularly Assamese in matters of government employment. The migrant Bengalese were also considered a threat to the language and culture of the Assamese people. Due to this, the Assamese people particularly its middle class and intellectuals were always anxious to get rid of Bengali majority Sylhet district which was considered to be the main hindrance in the way of formation of a homogenous province of Assam. Thus, the announcement of a referendum was considered, to quote the words of Sujit Chaudhuri, a noted scholar, 'a God-sent opportunity' (Chaudhuri 2002) to get rid of Sylhet; and, the Assamese people, in general, largely welcomed the decision. The historic referendum in Sylhet held on July 6-7, 1947 mandated in favour of Sylhet's transfer to East Pakistan except three and half police station areas viz. Patharkandi, Ratabari, Badarpur and half of Karimganj. The verdict of the referendum brought sigh of relief to the local people of Assam as the transfer of Sylhet finally signified the fulfillment of their long-cherished dream to 'carve out a linguistically more homogenous province' (Guha 2006, 261), and they rejoiced. But the jubilation turned out to be temporary and soon marred by the inflow of massive scale of refugee migration mainly Hindu Bengalese from East Pakistan. This revived and reinvigorated the fear and apprehension of Bengali domination which was already inherent in the minds of the local people of Assam particularly the Assamese so also the people of various ethnic communities and further intensified as time rolled on. As such, the existing old divides between the two principal communities of Assam- the Assamese and the Bengalese not only raised their head but also several new fissures developed in the changed circumstances of the post-independence period. Resultantly, a very critical complicated situation developed in

the state. Therefore, it may be said that, while Partition is largely a settled fact in other parts of the country; in Assam it is still an unresolved affair which not only left behind bitter memories and experiences for the victims, but also brought in its trail several unresolved issues such as immigration problem, citizenship question and so on which continue to haunt the surviving generations even after so many years of India's Partition. In this backdrop, the present paper seeks to discuss the politics of immigration issue in Assam in the post-independence period; and thereby analyze the resultant contestations over citizenship in Assam and its effects on the people. Required data and information for the study has been collected from secondary sources such as books, journal articles, newspaper reports and writeups, government documents and various internet sources.

### **Revisiting Immigration Politics in Assam in the Post-independence Period**

Illegal immigration is a highly intricate and contentious issue in Assam in the post-independence period with far-reaching consequences on the demographic, socio-economic, political and cultural scenario of Assam. Migration to Assam is not a new phenomenon and in fact, has a historical legacy. However, the migration centric turbulent and chaotic situation traces its origin to the British annexation of Assam in 1826. In fact, the British occupation of Assam paved the way for the migration of various groups of people to Assam such as the Hindu Bengalese, Bengali Muslim peasants, tea garden workers, Marwari traders and businessmen, Nepali graziers and so on. However, among all the migrants, the arrival of the Bengalese since inception had never been a welcome phenomenon and in fact, generated tensions and bitter feelings in the minds of the local people particularly the Assamese. As such, the latter began to consider the Bengali people as a threat to their language, culture and identity. In this regard, it is certain that the British through the application of 'divide and rule' policy were quite successful in creating a dividing line among the people of Assam particularly between the two principal communities- Bengalese and the Assamese on linguistic and religious basis. And subsequently, this fear-psychosis of the Assamese and people of other ethnic groups have been capitalized by various political forces to serve their vested interests. The apprehension of Bengali domination temporarily subsided with Sylhet's transfer to East Pakistan. One can have an impression of the jubilation at Sylhet's transfer from a statement of Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam, on September 5, 1947 which reads thus, 'The natives of Assam are now masters of their own house. They have a government which is both responsible and responsible to them. The Bengali no longer has the power, even if he had the will, to impose anything on the people of these hills and valleys which constitute Assam' (Chaudhuri 2002). However, the exultation was soon

replaced by anxiety and distress in the face of large-scale inflow of Hindu Bengali refugees to Assam so also other NE states which continued over the years.

Thus, India's Partition followed by independence added a new dimension to the immigration issue. In fact, it was only with independence the actual process of immigration started in Assam. Since inception, the refugees were not welcome in Assam. As such, despite the positive attitude of the national leaders towards the refugees, the issue of their rehabilitation was hindered due to politicalization and indifferent, rather, negative attitude of Gopinath Bordoloi-led state government and eventually the immigration issue remained unresolved over the years. Moreover, influx of Muslim immigrants to India, particularly in Assam, continued as was in pre-partition era for maintenance of livelihood; and such flows of both Hindus and Muslims continued even after the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. Various political parties have repeatedly flared up the immigration issue for their political gains. Successive governments in Assam, no doubt, tried to solve this issue in their own way suited to their agenda, through piecemeal measures, which however proved to be unsuccessful in delivering any permanent solution to the problem. Resultantly, ill-feelings and hatred against the immigrants persisted and even at times had a violent manifestation. The culmination of these issues and events was the Assam Movement led by AASU-AAGSP. This Anti-foreigners Agitation lasted for six years (1979-1985), until the signing of the Assam Accord between the agitators and the Governments of India and Assam in 1985. Following the signing of the Accord, a good section of AASU members and some others formed a political party named, 'Asom Gana Parishad', which came to power in Assam through the 1985 State Assembly polls. The people of Assam voted them to power with the hope that they would bring in a permanent solution of the immigration issue. But contrary to popular anticipation, the party and its government miserably failed to live up to the peoples' expectations and the immigration issue remained unresolved. Meanwhile, in the absence of any authentic worked out figure of the immigrants, various groups and people with vested interests publicized basically arbitrary and exaggerated figures about unauthorized immigrants present in Assam which, at times, ranged between 4 to 6 million or even more; and such happenings worsened the prevailing situation further. In nutshell, in the post-Accord period, its implementation remained a common electoral agenda for every political party that formed government in Assam in the following period, and it turned into a hotly debated issue with political ramifications. However, no concrete progress could be achieved and resultantly, even after the lapse of 39 years of signing of the Assam Accord, the immigration issue remains unresolved in Assam.

## Contestations over Citizenship in Assam and its Implications

In India, 'citizenry' has been defined by the Citizenship Act, 1955 and subsequent amendments to it. However, citizenship is a highly debated and controversial issue in Assam since independence. Colonialism, migration and Partition of India overwhelmingly contributed to this process. As noted earlier, the migration of various sections of people particularly the Bengalese and its periodic politicization during the British rule generated a feeling of mutual suspicion, distrust and ill-feeling in the minds of the Assamese people so also the people of various tribal communities about the former. With the Partition and transfer of Sylhet, the situation temporarily eased. However, in the changed circumstances of the post-Partition period, the torrential flow of refugees from East Pakistan mainly Hindu Bengalese revived the old schism between the Assamese and the Bengalese. An apprehension that due to mass scale refugee flow, the local people would not only become minority but also their language and culture would be jeopardized due to the dominance of Bengali people loomed large in the minds of the former. And further, periodic politicization of the immigration issue added fuel to the fire. Resultantly, over the years a very uneasy and turmoil situation developed in Assam.

Therefore, in the post-independence period, a number of initiatives have been adopted from time to time to address the twin issues of illegal immigration and citizenship question in Assam. In 1951, following the first census operations in the country, a National Register of Citizens (NRC) was prepared in Assam, an exercise first of its kind in the history of India. NRC was prepared with the purpose of enlisting the names of all valid and genuine citizens residing in the state of Assam. Although it was a national register of Citizens but it was prepared only for Assam. The 1951 NRC for Assam was handwritten and about 80 lakhs of people were included in the list (Das 2019, 19-20). However, preparation of NRC in the post-independence period failed to either eliminate or reduce the angst about foreigners' issue in Assam. Thus, periodically hue and cry about land alienation so also minoritization of the so-called indigenous people due to 'illegal' immigration to Assam rent high in the air. All these left a very adverse impact on the psyche of the people and repeated demands were made for the detection and deportation of the foreigners from Assam. Periodic politicization of the immigration issue further complicated the puzzle.

The historic Assam Accord signed as a result of Assam Movement among other provisions, decided a cut-off date and year i.e. 24<sup>th</sup> March (Midnight), 1971 for the purpose of detection and deportation of foreigners from Assam. Hence, through this Accord, those immigrants who came to Assam from erstwhile East Pakistan i.e. present Bangladesh till midnight of 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1971 were recognized as citizens of India. However, while

recognizing the citizenship of pre-March 25, 1971 immigrants, a clause was attached that those immigrants who entered Assam in between 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1966 and 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1971 need to enroll their names before the designated government authorities. They would be deprived of voting rights for a term of ten years and after that, they would be entitled to get citizenship rights. Accordingly, as per the provisions of the Accord, the Citizenship Act, 1955 which is the main law for determination of citizenship had been amended and a separate Clause 6A was incorporated exclusively for Assam. All these measures however, failed to solve the illegal immigration debate and the consequent citizenship tangle in Assam; both the issues as earlier, periodically continued to rock the society and politics of the state.

On the other side, through it is required to revise and update the NRC from time to time, any concrete initiative for the updation of NRC-1951 prepared for Assam was not undertaken until 2005. It may be noted that, there was no provision of NRC updation in the Assam Accord also. The issue of NRC updation came to the limelight in the tripartite meeting of the representatives of Central government, State government and AASU held on May 5, 2005 for the solution of the vexed immigration problem in Assam (Das 2019, 22). It was resolved to complete the process of updation of NRC-1951 within two years; but ultimately the process could not get underway for several reasons. Finally, honourable Supreme Court of India intervened in the matter and in connection with its combined judgment on three writ petitions filed by Assam Public Works (2009), Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha (2012) and All Assam Ahom Association (2014) (Dutta 2018, 19), direction was given for an updation of 1951-NRC of Assam. Thus, the updation of NRC-1951 formally commenced in December 2013 under the supervision of Supreme Court, and Prateek Hajela, an IAS officer was appointed the NRC State Co-ordinator. The whole process was indeed a mammoth exercise. Moreover, it was extremely arduous and complicated one be it either filling up of application form or establishment of legacy with forefathers or family tree verification. Even acquisition of required documents for application was equally challenging for several people. In fact, base documents such as voters list of 1951 and the NRC, 1951 was missing in several districts. For instance, in six districts of Assam such as Cachar, Karbi Anglong, Baksa, Chirang and Sivasagar, NRC could not be found (Talukdar 2020, 158).

Adding to the complications, periodic changes in the rules and modalities so also several errors or mistakes committed at the administrative level created unwarranted trouble and harassment for the common people. Not only this, several instances have come to light where people in possession of requisite documents found it difficult to convince the designated officials regarding the authenticity or genuineness of their submitted

documents. Ironically, it was rather a process of exclusion and not inclusion. Besides, during the verification process, a new identity tag 'OI' was evolved whereby in applications of certain categories of people such as ethnic tribes and such others, 'OI' was written which implies 'Original Inhabitant' of Assam (pre-1951 residents of Assam). As argued, such an arrangement was made to enable the people marked as 'OI' to automatically make it to the NRC without submission of documents (Das 2019, 29). It is interesting to note that the system altogether excluded Bengalese-both Hindus and Muslims, Nepalis from the OI category leading to severe protests. Thus, a clear division was made between the 'OI' and 'non-OI'; and basically, linguistic and religious minorities were included in the latter category. Anyway, all these occurrences created unnecessary debates so also chaos and confusion among the people.

Above all, setting aside administrative hurdles, politicization of the NRC issue and rumor mongering since inception tormented the lives of innumerable people. As such, during the NRC process several heart-wrenching incidents came to light where people unable to trace the legacy document or completion of other necessary formalities, or for not figuring in the draft NRC failed to bear the trauma and died; and there were many instances where people committed suicide fearing social ostracism or passing a wretched life in the detention camps and in extreme case being pushed back to Bangladesh. The whole exercise culminated in the publication of two drafts on December 31, 2017 and on July 30, 2018 respectively, followed by the publication of the final NRC on August 31, 2019 including 31,121,004 lakhs of people, out of a total of 3.29 crores; thereby excluding 19,06,657 people from it. It may be noted that the NRC which was prepared with much expectations and enthusiasm also failed to solve the problem and rather complicated it further. Actually, the number of exclusions failed to satisfy a section of people and organizations including the advocates of NRC updation like AASU and Assam Public Works, as to their expectation the exclusions ought to have been much more. Thus, demands have been made for a re-verification of NRC and some even sought rejection of the NRC itself. Hence, there is a perception that the NRC which was a product of relentless service of several thousand workers spanning over almost six years, and prepared at an estimated cost of 1600 crores of rupees perhaps went in vain. Now, as the matter stands, even after the passage of more than four and a half years since the publication of NRC in August 2019, it has not received the approval of Union Home Ministry through gazette notification and its fate is shrouded in uncertainty. Besides, there is no directive yet as regards the destiny of the NRC drop outs such as process of appeal in Foreigners Tribunals to defend citizenship claim and so on. In fact, NRC authority could not provide at least the rejection slips which is undoubtedly an important official paper documenting the ground

for non-inclusion in NRC. The silence of the Supreme Court in this regard is equally surprising. Under such situation the NRC dropouts are passing a life marked by anxiety and confusion; and most importantly, stand at the risk of statelessness.

Amidst these developments, the Union government enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 in December 2019, through an amendment of Citizenship Act, 1955, to enable migrants belonging to six religious minority groups, viz., Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis from either Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan who in the face of religious persecution took shelter in India till December 31, 2014, apply for Indian citizenship. The passage of the Act was followed by tumult of protests and agitations in several parts of the country including Assam. And the opposition to the Act was not something unexpected in Assam keeping in view the existing history of foreigners' problem and contestations over citizenship in the state. Meanwhile the politicization of the issue continued in full swing thereby fueling mutual hatred among the people. Very recently, in March 2024 the Union Home Ministry notified the modalities for the implementation of CAA after a lapse of more than four years since its notification. And, it is evident from various preliminary reports that contrary to general expectation, the rate of application under CAA, 2019 is quite low in Assam. Even doubts are raised from several quarters about the effectiveness of the Act in providing relief to the people of notified minorities staying in Assam without nationality status for decades and waiting for Indian citizenship. In this context, it is significant to note that, even Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma soon after the notification of CAA rules on March 11, 2024 commented that, 'CAA will be a fiasco in Assam...' ('CAA will be fiasco in Assam, says Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma' 2024). The main argument behind such viewpoint is that filing application for citizenship under CAA, 2019 entails fulfillment of certain conditions which might be quite difficult for a considerable section of these people migrating from Bangladesh to comply with. Now, it is up to time to decide the implications of CAA, 2019 for Assam; however, it can be said without doubt that periodic politicization of the issue continues to complicate the existing tangle and aggravated the feeling of alienation among the people at large.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Partition is a historical fact and it is to be accepted with its consequences whatsoever. However, while in various other parts of the country, the issues arising out of it have been fixed over time; in case of Assam and North-east, these have remained unsettled till date. In fact, Partition has brought a series of unresolved issues here and hence, its legacies, such as issue of illegal immigration and citizenship conundrum in Assam, continue to



haunt the surviving generations even after 77 years of India's independence. Periodic politicization of these contentious issues has aggravated the situation; and therefore, a critical situation developed in Assam over the years. And the linguistic minorities, particularly the Bengalese are the worst victim of the circumstances. Several measures adopted periodically to solve the problems have failed to achieve the desired result in the absence of political good will. Now while the illegal immigration continues to remain an issue of great concern; and on the top of it, the NRC issue since remaining unsettled have together posed a great question as to the destiny of those who would be identified as *avaidha bideshi* (illegal foreigners) after the finalization of the NRC.

It is worthwhile to mention here that India has no repatriation treaty with Bangladesh to send back the people identified as unauthorized immigrants and it is unlikely that Government of India will be desirous to advance any such treaty with Bangladesh at the cost of its 'Neighbourhood First' policy and also keeping in view the geo-political and strategic importance of Bangladesh to India to enable the latter to control China's ambitious footprints in South-Asian region. Moreover, Bangladesh rejects India's claim that a good number of Bangladeshi citizens have illegally immigrated to India. Besides, housing of the immigrants for an indefinite period in the detention camps also cannot be a solution in view of recurrent financial strain on public exchequer and reported violation of human rights in the camps. In view of such situation, the issue of NRC drop-outs should be seen in the light of the concurrent situation of statelessness in various regions of the world, including South Asia. The immediate need of the hour warrants that both the Government and the Supreme Court of India should come forward and intervene in the matter to work out a suitable measure to settle the contentious immigration issue and citizenship tangle in Assam at the earliest. Some other possible measures may include enactment of an immigration law for India, issuance of work permit to the migrants, ratification of 1951 Refugee Convention and so on. Above all, there is the urgent need of a strong political will to solve the immigration problem faced by Assam.

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## Gender Inequality in Unpaid Labour: Examining time use patterns in Kerala

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### Abstract

*In the pursuit of material wealth, the often-overlooked impact of unpaid work is significant. These domestic tasks are frequently dismissed as women's primary responsibility based on socially constructed gender roles, despite carrying immense value. Women are expected to serve as caregivers and homemakers without remuneration. This study stands out as it aims to capture the time use pattern of women and men in Kerala using the Time Use Survey, shedding light on the gender disparity in time allocation across various activities, to the significant disadvantage of women. The analysis reveals that women spend significantly less time on SNA activities compared to men. However, when considering Extended SNA activities, including household maintenance, care, and community services, males spent only 12.5 hours per week compared to 49.61 hours per week by females. In non-SNA activities, which pertain to leisure, personal care, and learning, males spent 23.49 hours more than females. This highlights the entrenched responsibility of women for unpaid work, particularly in housework and caregiving. Moreover, the types of activities in which women engage differ significantly from those of men, with women predominantly performing traditionally feminine tasks like cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Government intervention is crucial to foster a gender-conscious society. Time-use data can assist government agencies in monitoring and designing policies aimed at recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work, thereby promoting gender equality.*

**Keywords:** Gender inequality, Household work, Sex roles, System of National Accounts, Time Use Survey, Unpaid work

### Introduction

Gender is a socially constructed system that categorises individuals into distinct groups, men and women, and establishes social relations of inequality based on this difference. While biological sex differences exist, they are translated into gender inequality throughout human history (Butler 1990, 8-10). Men are typically perceived as breadwinners and heads of households, while women are often relegated to roles as homemakers and caregivers, with their domestic tasks considered their primary responsibility under patriarchal norms (Oakley 1972, 122-123).

These social norms and practices impose constraints on women, denying them equal access to opportunities emerging from development processes. Wifehood and motherhood are glorified within the patriarchal system, with the welfare and happiness of a family often perceived as dependent on women's performance

of domestic duties. Consequently, women are expected to continue fulfilling household responsibilities even as they enter the labour market, and obtaining employment outside the home does not necessarily improve their well-being (Barnett and Baruch 1987, 130-139).

Women often face the challenge of balancing paid work with the 'second shift' of unpaid housework and caregiving responsibilities, leaving them with limited time for personal care and leisure (Hochschild and Machung 1989, 241-242). Additionally, their disadvantaged position is exacerbated by their domestic and parental duties, resulting in lower quality free time compared to men (Chatzitheochari and Arber 2012, 451-471).

This paper focuses on gender inequalities in the time use pattern in Kerala, aiming to contribute to the literature by examining the complex issue of gendered divisions in unpaid labour using micro-level data and analysis. It provides insights into unpaid work and explores theoretical perspectives on its gender dimension before discussing the methods and results of the study.

#### Unpaid work and theoretical perspectives on its gender dimension

Individuals allocate their time to paid work, unpaid work, and no work. Paid work is compensated, while unpaid work, which includes household chores, caregiving, subsistence activities, family enterprise work, and voluntary services, lacks direct remuneration. Globally, unpaid work constitutes 35-50 per cent of total work time, primarily shouldered by women (Antonopoulos 2009, 4-7). Despite its critical role in societal well-being, unpaid work is often overlooked in economic analysis.

Classical and neo-classical economists excluded unpaid work from economic production, focusing only on market activities. Simon Kuznets, for example, did not include unpaid work in national income calculations, considering it 'housewives' production' (Hirway 2015, 9). Contemporary heterodox economists, however, recognize unpaid domestic activities as essential forms of production with opportunity costs. Despite this, traditional statistics still often exclude unpaid work, underestimating women's contributions and perpetuating gender biases.

The study of unpaid work's distribution underscores that sex-based role differentiations are socially constructed. Various theoretical perspectives explain these roles. The Socialist-feminist approach posits that women's unpaid household work is shaped by capitalism and patriarchy, allowing men to control and exploit women's labour (Hartmann 1979, 8-11). The New home economics theory suggests that the traditional labour division arises from rational choices aimed at maximizing household utility, with partners specializing in different roles (Becker 1981, 30-48). The Relative resources and Economic bargaining

models propose that household task allocation reflects power dynamics, with economic dependency reducing women's bargaining power (Brines 1994, 662-673; McGinnity and Russell 2008, 53-56).

The 'Doing gender' approach views housework and caregiving as symbolic enactments of gender relations, performed consistently by women regardless of employment status (West and Zimmerman 1987, 136-144). From a sociological perspective, Functionalism suggests sex-role differentiation maintains social equilibrium by assigning complementary roles (Parsons and Bales 1955, 190-212). Conversely, Conflict theory views gender differentiation as reflecting women's subjugation by men, sustained by cultural beliefs (Collins 1971, 1005-1013).

These perspectives emphasize that societal sex-role patterns are socially, not biologically, constructed, highlighting the need to address gender inequalities in unpaid work.

### **Gender inequalities in the Time Use Pattern in Kerala**

Despite Kerala's renowned social achievements and favourable sex ratio, the state's social transformation has been uneven, marked by the persistence of feudal-patriarchal attitudes and institutions. While women's literacy rates and participation in income-generating activities have increased, conservative norms regarding the distribution of household work remain largely unchanged. This paper explores gender inequalities in Kerala through an analysis of time use patterns.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Kerala, a southern state in India, using a stratified random sampling method to select 120 households, comprising 56 rural and 64 urban households. All household members aged 15 years and above were surveyed, resulting in primary data collection from 359 individuals, including 191 females and 168 males. The Time Use Survey method was employed to capture a comprehensive account of all forms of work, utilizing the Recall method, where respondents reported their time spent on pre-listed activities from the previous day.

To analyse the time-use patterns, the study adopted an activity classification based on the Report of the Time Use Survey, 1998-99 (2000, 114-118), which classified activities into nine categories:

1. Primary production activities
2. Secondary activities
3. Trade, Business, and Services
4. Household maintenance, management, and shopping for own households

5. Care for children, the sick, elderly, and disabled for own households
6. Community services and help to other households
7. Social, cultural, and recreational activities
8. Learning
9. Personal care and self-maintenance

The first three categories correspond to System of National Accounts (SNA) activities within the production boundary. The next three categories represent Extended SNA activities, while the final three categories encompass non-SNA activities.

SNA refers to internationally agreed-upon standards for compiling economic activity measures based on strict accounting conventions and economic principles (United Nations 2009, 1-2). Extended SNA activities comprise non-marketed activities excluded from the production boundary of SNA but recognized as economic activities by the United Nations. Non-SNA activities include those aimed at personal maintenance and development.

## Results

The results reinforce the perception that women have been responsible for unpaid work, especially housework and caring. Men spend the most time on SNA activities. In rural areas, women average 33.24 hours per week on these activities, while men average 42.67 hours. Urban residents devote more time to paid activities, with women averaging 48.8 hours and men 50.21 hours weekly. Overall, women spend 40.69 hours per week on paid SNA activities, and men spend 45.81 hours. For unpaid SNA activities, rural women average 8.15 hours weekly, and rural men 10.93 hours. In urban areas, women spend more time on unpaid activities than men, averaging 10.41 hours compared to 4.27 hours. Overall, women average 9.3 hours per week on unpaid SNA activities, while men average 8.05 hours. Additionally, 79 per cent of the female participants work in enterprises or farms run by their spouse or father without pay.

Extended SNA activities are categorised into household maintenance, care for dependents, and community services. For household maintenance, rural women spend 51.48 hours per week, while rural men spend 6.71 hours. Urban women spend 40.17 hours, and urban men 6.73 hours. Overall, women average 45.31 hours weekly on household tasks, compared to 6.72 hours for men. In caregiving, rural women spend 18.13 hours per week, rural men 11.66 hours; urban women spend 24.28 hours, urban men 17.7 hours. On average, women spend 21.36 hours per week on caregiving, men 13.54 hours. For community services, both genders have low involvement, but men participate slightly more. Rural women spend 0.68 hours weekly, rural men

3.63 hours; urban women spend 0.8 hours, urban men 1.8 hours. Overall, women spend 0.7 hours per week on community services, while men spend 2.57 hours.

Women clearly bear the greatest burden of housework and caregiving, averaging 6 to 7 hours per day. This burden is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas, primarily due to smaller household sizes and the availability of time-saving devices like washing machines and mixer grinders in urban homes.

Housework and caregiving involve a wide range of activities that require varying levels of effort, time, and commitment. Daily tasks like cooking and caring for children, the elderly, or the disabled demand consistent effort and time. Other tasks, such as shopping and repairing household goods, are performed as needed. Some activities, like gardening or washing the car, are flexible and less stressful.

Analysis of time allocation for extended SNA activities shows significant gender and rural-urban disparities. Rural women spend 35.52 hours per week on cooking, while urban women spend 26.91 hours, averaging 29.62 hours. Both rural and urban men spend only 4.5 hours on cooking. For house cleaning, rural women spend 6.45 hours and urban women 4.41 hours, averaging 5.64 hours. Rural women spend 10.21 hours on laundry, urban women 4.15 hours, averaging 7.6 hours, while rural men spend 2 hours and urban men 3.34 hours, averaging 2.89 hours.

In shopping, rural women spend 6.27 hours and urban women 12.45 hours, averaging 9.85 hours, while both rural and urban men spend 6 hours. Pet care is equal for rural and urban women at 3.5 hours, whereas both rural and urban men spend 0.5 hours. Both rural and urban women spend 14 hours on the physical care of the sick, elderly, or disabled, with no time recorded for men. Rural women spend 25 hours on physical care of children, urban women 18.37 hours, averaging 20.81 hours, while rural men spend 2.5 hours and urban men 7 hours, averaging 6 hours.

For accompanying children, rural women spend 1 hour and urban women 27 hours, averaging 11 hours. Rural men spend 4.4 hours and urban men 8.38 hours, averaging 7.28 hours. For teaching and training children, rural women spend 7 hours and urban women 14 hours, averaging 11.77 hours, while rural men spend 6.02 hours and urban men 7.26 hours, averaging 6.54 hours.

This data highlights that women, especially in rural areas, spend significantly more time on household tasks and caregiving activities than men. Urban women also spend considerable time on these activities, though generally less than their rural counterparts. Men's involvement is much lower, except for installation or repairs, where they are exclusively engaged.

Cooking is the most time-consuming activity for women, done daily. Cleaning and maintaining homes are considered female activities, and the physical care of the sick, elderly, and disabled is almost exclusively

done by women. Traditional tasks like cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring for children and adults continue to be primarily women's responsibilities. Men dominate only in installation and repair tasks. They also contribute more to accompanying children and teaching them, but their involvement in other activities is minimal or non-existent.

There are clear hierarchies in domestic activities, with everyday cooking and cleaning bathrooms never done by men. Overall, women are more involved in unpaid activities, and the types of tasks they perform differ from men, underscoring the persistent gendered division of labour in unpaid activities, regardless of regional differences.

The study also found no significant difference in the time spent on household activities between employed and unemployed women. Employed women spent 47.72 hours per week on household work, while unemployed women spent 50 hours. This indicates that household activities are mandatory for women, and having a full-time or part-time job does not significantly reduce this burden. Combining paid and unpaid work leads to acute time pressure for women, leaving little or no room for leisure and hindering their ability to acquire additional skills. Consequently, men with a female partner at home have an unfair advantage over women in the workplace, as they do not have to manage household chores on their own.

Since time is finite, gender differences in unpaid work put a ceiling on women's opportunities in other areas of life. The burden of unpaid work restrains women's time for Non-SNA activities which include personal maintenance and development. These activities are categorised into social, cultural, and recreational activities, learning, and personal care and self-maintenance.

In rural areas, women spend an average of 30.77 hours per week on social, cultural, and recreational activities, while men spend 52.41 hours. For learning, rural women spend 22.67 hours, and men spend 20.92 hours. In personal care and self-maintenance, rural women spend 74.46 hours, whereas men spend 104.6 hours.

In urban areas, women spend 32.03 hours on social, cultural, and recreational activities, while men spend 62.74 hours. For learning, urban women spend 20.93 hours, and men spend 22.01 hours. In personal care and self-maintenance, urban women spend 74.35 hours, whereas men spend 100.06 hours.

Overall, women spend an average of 31.45 hours on social, cultural, and recreational activities, while men spend 57.2 hours. For learning, women spend 21.56 hours, and men spend 21.59 hours. In personal care and self-maintenance, women spend 74.4 hours, whereas men spend 102.52 hours.

The data indicates that men generally spend more time than women on social, cultural, and recreational activities, and on personal care and self-maintenance. The time spent on learning is relatively similar



between men and women. Additionally, urban men and women tend to spend more time on these activities compared to their rural counterparts.

Men spend about double the time women spend on social, cultural, and recreational activities. Within these activities, women mostly engage in internal activities like watching television, while men engage in external activities. The burden of unpaid work limits women's ability to participate in activities outside the home and build social networks, perpetuating gender disparities.

Fairness in educating children is evident, with both genders spending 20-23 hours per week on learning, mainly due to young respondents attending school and classes.

Personal care and self-maintenance are essential for health and well-being. Women devote significantly less time to these activities compared to men; men get 14.64 hours per day for personal enhancement, while women get only 10.62 hours per day. This indicates that women sacrifice time for their self-development to serve other household members, who seem to be free-riding on unpaid labour provided by women.

The single most crucial indicator of the heavy burden of paid and unpaid work borne by women is the lack of sleep. Employed women sleep the least, averaging only 5.5 hours per day, as they must complete household chores before going to work. When asked what she would do with more free time, one respondent replied, 'Of course, I would sleep.'

Another primary concern under personal care is the amount of rest. Eight percent of employed women complained that they do not get time to rest or relax during weekdays. Gender differences are also evident in the time taken to eat and drink. Women often spend more time serving others than eating, have to feed young children along with themselves, or combine eating with other activities due to time constraints. For sleep, rural women spend 42.25 hours per week, urban women spend 45.71 hours, averaging 44.1 hours. Rural men spend 57.38 hours and urban men spend 49.53 hours, averaging 53.46 hours. For eating and drinking, rural women spend 12.6 hours, urban women spend 13.82 hours, averaging 13.25 hours. Rural men spend 27.12 hours and urban men spend 23 hours, averaging 25.23 hours. In personal hygiene and health, both rural and urban women spend 3.5 hours weekly, while rural men spend 3.89 hours and urban men 3.95 hours, averaging 3.92 hours. For walking or other exercise, both rural and urban women spend 7 hours weekly. Rural men spend 5.83 hours and urban men spend 7 hours, averaging 6.54 hours.

For rest and relaxation, rural women spend 6.35 hours and urban women 7.16 hours, averaging 6.79 hours. Rural men spend 11.72 hours and urban men 10.4 hours, averaging 11.12 hours. In individual religious practices and meditation, rural women spend 3.5 hours and urban women 4.25 hours, averaging 3.92 hours. Rural men spend 5.6 hours and urban men 5.25 hours, averaging 5.47 hours.

The data highlights notable gender and rural-urban differences in time allocation for personal and non-productive activities, with men generally spending more time on sleep, eating, and relaxation compared to women. Overall, women spend about five times more on extended SNA activities than men. When combining SNA and extended SNA activities, women work longer hours than men. This imbalance impacts women's ability to participate effectively outside the home and develop their skills, perpetuating gender disparities in time use and opportunities.

The analysis of respondents' opinions on sharing unpaid work with male household members reveals notable patterns. In rural areas, 42.15 per cent of females support sharing unpaid work with males, while 57.85 per cent do not. Among rural males, 26.37 per cent support sharing, whereas 73.63 per cent oppose it. In urban areas, 43.82 per cent of females favour sharing unpaid work with males, while 56.18 per cent do not. Among urban males, 29.87 per cent support sharing, while 70.13 per cent do not. Overall, 42.93 per cent of females support sharing unpaid work with males, while 57.07 per cent do not. Only 26.78 per cent of males are in favour of sharing, while 73.22 per cent oppose it.

The data shows that more females than males support the idea of sharing unpaid work. Urban respondents, both male and female, are slightly more supportive of sharing unpaid work compared to their rural counterparts. However, a majority of both males and females, in both rural and urban areas, do not support sharing unpaid work with male members of the household.

Despite finding household tasks burdensome, many women consider it their responsibility, particularly for wives. One employed female respondent mentioned, 'Both my husband and I are employed and equally tired after work. However, I am the one who has to cook. He does not even wash a dish. It saddens me that my son is now following his father's attitude.' She also asserted, 'I feel obligated to do this because it's my duty. It would be a great relief if my husband helped.' This scenario reflects most households and highlights serious implications. Patriarchal values are ingrained in the family unit and passed on to the next generation. Notably, when asked about sharing work, all respondents used the term "helping" rather than "sharing," indicating a belief that domestic work is primarily the duty of female members.

## **Discussion**

In line with the findings, five important issues are emphasised here. Firstly, unpaid work absorbs women's time and energy, enhancing the well-being of other household members. Development involves broadening life choices by improving capabilities (Human Development Report 1997, 15). These capabilities, such as education and health, are not only advanced through economic activities but also through tasks like cooking

and caring, which are unpaid. Consequently, unpaid work contributes not only to current household consumption but also to future well-being, while also mitigating labour fatigue and enabling male family members to return to work. It serves as a foundational support for sectors like business, health, and education. By providing this work for free, women effectively subsidize the cost of care, which sustains families and bolsters economies by filling gaps in public services (Hirway 2015, 10-11). This unrecognized work is fundamental to societal sustenance and function and warrants inclusion in statistical frameworks.

Secondly, the burden of unpaid work penalizes women in several ways. Engaging in such work often obstructs their ability to secure full-time jobs with decent wages, hindering the benefits of formal sector employment. Furthermore, full-time unpaid workers lack opportunities for upward mobility, promotions, retirement, or pensions; this responsibility is often perceived as lifelong. Consequently, it creates an unfair barrier to equal participation and payment in the labour force.

Many women, despite desiring additional income, find themselves unable to pursue new job opportunities due to the extensive list of household chores. This reality reflects the enduring influence of patriarchy. As a result, women often seek employment in the informal sector, where wages are low, and benefits are limited, allowing them to balance household duties. For example, in Kerala, there is a recent trend of married women with B.Tech degrees working from home for relatively low salaries. This highlights a significant portion of the labour force being confined to low-productivity jobs with minimal social security benefits. Despite these penalties, the societal benefits of women's labour remain substantial.

Thirdly, the economy misallocates resources by underutilizing women's potential in the market, resulting in lower productivity and economic growth. Failing to capitalize on the complementarity between women and men in the workplace further exacerbates this issue. The International Monetary Fund (2016, 1-18) suggests that a country's GDP could increase significantly by fully leveraging the potential of the female labour force. Thus, the gender gap in unpaid work is not only unfair but also inefficient.

Fourthly, women prioritize domestic chores, which consume a significant amount of time, over personal well-being. This leaves minimal time for self-care and development activities, such as acquiring additional skills and knowledge.

Finally, women's perception of household work as solely their responsibility restricts their ability to seek paid employment outside the home, compromising their health and increasing their vulnerability. Despite high levels of education, women often fail to recognize the persistent gender inequality within family dynamics and inadvertently perpetuate age-old patriarchal values, passing them on to the next generation.

Lack of awareness perpetuates the challenge of establishing a fair space for women within the family and society.

### Conclusions

Kerala, a state known for its high social indicators comparable to developed countries, showcases a paradox: despite females outperforming males in many developmental aspects, patriarchy remains evident in the widespread societal commitment to women's domestic roles. The perception of males as heads of households remains strongly entrenched in society, with women internalizing these patriarchal values.

On average, women in Kerala spend 7.15 hours per day on unpaid domestic activities, constituting about one-third of their entire day. Men's participation in these activities is minimal, reflecting gender-based divisions and hierarchies within the household. This mirrors the gender roles observed in the public sphere, underscoring the persistence of traditional gender norms.

Furthermore, the time spent on Non-SNA activities does not favour women, highlighting the invisibility of this highly unequal distribution and its contribution to power imbalances and gender inequalities. Conducting time use surveys can inform the design of public policies and social interventions aimed at recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work, thereby promoting gender equality.

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## Memory, Motherhood, and Feminine Consciousness in Urmila Pawar's

### *The Weave of My Life* and Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants*

Aneeshya V. and Christina Rebecca S.

#### Abstract

*The article examines the themes of memory, motherhood, and feminine consciousness in the autobiographies of Urmila Pawar and Sujatha Gidla, *The Weave of My Life* and *Ants Among Elephants* respectively. These autobiographies provide profound insights into how maternal influence shapes identity, resilience, and resistance among Dalit women. By analysing the authors' reflections on their mothers' lives, this article highlights the vital role of maternal narratives in fostering collective feminine consciousness and empowering marginalised communities. The study underscores the intergenerational transmission of strength and the creation of a space for emancipation through the documentation of maternal experiences. It also emphasises the importance of these narratives in challenging and redefining dominant socio-cultural discourses, offering insights for promoting social justice and equality. Comparative analysis is employed to identify commonalities and divergences in the representation of memory, motherhood, and feminine consciousness.*

Keywords: Dalit autobiographies, maternal narratives, feminine consciousness, caste and gender, resilience and empowerment

#### Introduction

Dalit literature, characterised by its resistance against caste oppression, has gained prominence in recent years. Autobiographies, as a genre, offer a space for Dalit women writers to articulate their experiences, challenging dominant narratives and providing a platform for marginalised voices. This research aims to analyse the autobiographical works of Sujatha Gidla and Urmila Pawar, focusing on the themes of memory, motherhood, and feminine consciousness. This study examines the ways in which both authors utilise memory as a tool for developing feminine consciousness, providing a deeper understanding of their

struggles and triumphs within the complex socio-cultural context of caste-based discrimination. By examining these elements, it is understood how Dalit women negotiate their identities within a socio-cultural context that is marked by caste-based discrimination.

Motherhood and memory are foundational elements in the construction of feminine consciousness, particularly within the autobiographical narratives of Dalit women. Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* present caste-based discrimination based on personal and collective memory, the role of motherhood in shaping identity, and the development of a distinct feminine consciousness within the Dalit context. They employ memory as a powerful tool in the development of their feminine consciousness, sharing their experiences of growing up as Dalit women in India.

A mother's journey shapes a woman's life. In the autobiographies of Sujatha Gidla and Urmila Pawar, the experience of motherhood moulds the personal identities of the authors and explores the broader socio-political struggles faced by them and delve into the intricacies of identity formation, social change, and resilience through their mothers' lives.

### Memory and Identity

Memory is a crucial aspect of identity formation. The impact of historical injustices and social marginalisation on the collective memory of Dalits is explored, highlighting the ways in which personal and community memories intersect and shape individual consciousness. A Dalit woman, in recounting her past, seeks to chart a path for the future, with her mother's experiences forming the foundation of her own life narrative.

In *The Weave of My Life*, Urmila Pawar reflects on her childhood in Maharashtra, painting vivid images of her early life experiences. These recollections are not mere personal anecdotes but rather embedded within the socio-political context of the time, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the Dalit experience. Similarly, Sujatha Gidla's narrative, *Ants Among Elephants*, is imbued with memories of her upbringing in Andhra Pradesh, providing readers with insights into the systemic nature of caste-based discrimination. Pawar and Gidla emphasise the significance of recalling and recording history to confront current injustices and promote social transformation.

Pawar delves into the theme of memory by recollecting her childhood and early life in India. She reflects on how these experiences have profoundly shaped her identity and worldview. Her memories are not just personal recollections but are also laden with the socio-political context of the time. Through her narrative, Pawar underscores the importance of remembering and documenting the past as a means to understand and challenge the present socio-cultural dynamics. Similarly Gidla explores the complexities of memory and its relationship to identity by reflecting on her childhood in India, recounting the ways in which her experiences have shaped her understanding of herself and her place in the world. It is a powerful testament to the impact of memory on personal and collective identity formation, highlighting the enduring influence of past experiences on present realities.

### **Motherhood and Agency**

Motherhood serves as a powerful metaphor and lived experience in the narratives of Dalit women. The interplay between societal expectations, familial responsibilities, and the empowerment of women through motherhood is examined within the autobiographical accounts. By observing her mother's life, a woman gains insight into her own existence, as her identity becomes intertwined with her mother's. In numerous instances, the presence of the mother resonates prominently in women's literature. The recounting of the mother's story not only guides women writers but also assumes significance in advancing social change agendas. Mothers are accorded agency to affect social change.

Central to both narratives is the profound influence of motherhood on the authors' identities and worldviews. Hailing from the Mahar caste in the Konkon region of Maharashtra, Pawar's mother, Laxmi Pawar, sustained the family by crafting bamboo baskets after her husband's passing. Her sole aspiration was to provide her children with an education. The very title of Pawar's narrative draws inspiration from her mother's resilience amidst adversity. 'My mother used to weave aaydans' (Pawar, 2008, x). Similar to her mother, who crafted aaydan for sustenance, Urmila Pawar intricately interlaces her mother's memories into her life story. The act of basket-weaving by her mother symbolizes the essence of Urmila Pawar's writing. 'The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering and agony that link us. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing is originally linked.' (Pawar, 2008, x) Writing and weaving, though distinct in their methods and outputs, share a common purpose: to express, to create, and to communicate the depths of human experience, 'text and textiles... are the same thing.' (Prain, 2014, x ). The image of



her mother skilfully weaving baskets beneath a tree resonates deeply within Urmila, shaping her sense of self.

‘That was the last thing our eyes, heavy with sleep, would take in before we went to bed. And when we opened our eyes early in the morning she would be sitting in the same place.’ (Pawar, 2008, 64) Despite ill health, her mother continued to weave baskets: “Pressing a rod or pestle into her stomach to lessen her pains, she would continue her weaving’ (Pawar, 2008, 75). In her school, a school teacher during the study hours always ordered Urmila ‘to do the dirty work, like cleaning the board, the class, collecting dirt, and disposing it off.’ (Pawar, 2008, 67) The teacher regarded such tasks as demeaning and assigned them to Urmila due to her caste identity as a Mahar. When she declined to comply, he resorted to physical punishment, striking her. Upon learning of this incident, Urmila's mother, Aaye, swiftly intervened to defend and support her daughter, issuing a stern warning to the teacher.

“Look. I am a widow, my life is ruined. Yet I sit here, under this tree, and work. Why? Because I want education for my children so that their future will be better. And you treat my girl like this? How dare you?” Aaye spoke in her native dialect with a commanding and resonant voice, her words echoing with authority as she asserted herself. Then she thundered. “Let me see you laying even a finger on my girl again and I’ll show you!” (Pawar, 2008, 69) The mother not only shielded her daughter from harm but also imparted invaluable lessons on essential survival skills within their societal context. The narrator/author recalls that Guruji has not beaten her again. And with this single incident she started considering her mother a great support. Pawar also recollects the incident of an attempt of sexual abuse directed towards her by a farmer. She pushed him and fought him bravely, but avoided telling her mother because ‘she would have simply torn him apart’ (Pawar, 2008, 126). This reinforces Pawar's resolve and fortitude, as she witnesses her mother's resilience and her relentless battle against injustice, recognizing the strength within herself to confront and overcome any form of abuse or discrimination. Her courage to fight back against all social evils and customs makes her daughter Urmila optimistic, which she then passed on to her daughters, Malavika and Manini.

Her mother's resilience, strength, and nurturing nature are depicted as foundational to Pawar's identity, illustrating how maternal figures serve as both role models and sources of strength for Dalit women. The ability to maintain dignity and strength in the face of relentless adversity becomes a source of inspiration for Pawar. This maternal influence extends beyond personal guidance, offering a broader framework for understanding how Dalit women navigate and challenge systemic oppression.

Similarly, Sujatha Gidla's mother, Manjula, becomes a symbol of perseverance and resistance against caste and gender discrimination. Gidla's reflections on her mother's struggles and triumphs highlight the intergenerational transmission of strength and the enduring impact of maternal narratives on feminine consciousness. Through their narratives of motherhood, both authors illuminate the complexities of familial bonds and the ways in which maternal figures shape the identities and aspirations of Dalit women.

In Gidla's memoir, her mother, Manjula, is also a pivotal figure. Gidla explores the complexities of mother-daughter relationships, reflecting on her mother's struggles as a Dalit woman in India and recounts Gidla's family history, spanning from her grandparents' lives to her own. She says, 'My stories, my family's stories were not stories in India. They were just life.' (Gidla, 2017, 1) Following a pause, she delves into another aspect 'when I left and made new friends in a new country, only then did the things that happened to my family, the things that happened to my family, the things we had done, become stories. Stories worth telling, stories worth writing down.' (Gidla, 2017, 1) She says, 'I was born in South India, in a town called Khazipet in the state of Andhra Pradesh... I was born into a lower middle class family... I was born an untouchable.' (Gidla, 2017, 1) By presenting these stand-alone sentences the text emphasises their independent significance without any obligatory connection.

This juxtaposition effectively conveys the idea that caste is both a circumstantial product of a specific culture and an inescapable reality, revealing a nuanced understanding that transcends the scope of conventional arguments. Gidla's narrative style and creative expression are characterised by a deliberate sense of disjunction and alienation. This unique approach allows her writing to be more captivating than the events it depicts. Gidla's conviction regarding the pervasive nature of caste horrors is palpable, yet her intriguingly detached tone, not merely a consequence of her relocation to America, the new country remains distinct from irony.

The text analyses the complexities of being a Dalit and being a Dalit woman. Gidla tries to narrow down the gap between Dalit male experiences and Dalit female experiences, and to urge the immediacy of making it gender neutral, thus making every experience as Dalit experience. The text talks about repression and gender bias in the most unpredictable situations. Gidla has based her story on the testimonies of her mother. Gidla through her Dalit language prevents the appropriation of stopping assertion of epistemic experiential authority. The individual journeys of Manjula and Satyam, offer unique insights into Sujatha's self-reflection.

A daughter identifies and relates herself to the unarticulated sufferings of her mother. Mother remains in the shadow of our culture. Patriarchal Dalit texts present mothers as all suffering silent creatures so that

they support caste system and patriarchy. Sujatha Gidla articulates her mother's story, where silence speaks. In her narrative, she presents her mother Manjula's sufferings as a common struggle of any Dalit woman. Manjula faced all sorts of discrimination and felt alienated as a student because her professor had strong caste prejudices she could secure only a second division.

'Then like a photo developing, a picture formed in her mind. She had made top marks in all the papers except for those that were graded by Tripathi... His venom had a delayed effect, and Manjula's career would suffer.' (Gidla, 2017, 196) Her story of victimisation as a student becomes the agony of any Dalit student who is given low grades, failed and ridiculed by the teachers because of their personal caste based grudges to commit suicide.

Even after being placed as a lecturer, when Manjula went to report at her place of posting, the caste prejudiced principal harshly told her: 'You have no job here. I won't let you report.' (Gidla, 2017, 244) Sujatha Gidla presents the marginal existence of Dalit women, even after being educated and placed, through her mother's story. Women are not allowed to make decisions, even about buying basic things to home. They are not allowed to take money for basic needs too. Manjula was educated and working but all her money was taken away by others. And all of them leeches off Manjula for their expenses. Moreover, she was left with nothing when she had to go to hospital or buy something for her children. Manjula remembers how better she felt economically when she stayed without her husband at her workplace. The thought of being transferred to his home town really made her upset, because she feared that her children and herself will be penniless and poor. (Gidla, 2017, 202)

Manjula's experiences of discrimination and perseverance significantly influence Gidla's own identity and sense of self. The memoir delves into the emotional and psychological impact of these maternal narratives, highlighting the critical role of mothers in shaping the identities and futures of their daughters. In Gidla's memoir, her mother, Manjula, is also a pivotal figure. Gidla explores the complexities of mother-daughter relationships, reflecting on her mother's struggles as a Dalit woman in India. Manjula's experiences of discrimination and perseverance significantly influence Gidla's own identity and sense of self. The memoir delves into the emotional and psychological impact of these maternal narratives, highlighting the critical role of mothers in shaping the identities and futures of their daughters. Gidla's mother's story provides her with the confidence and resilience needed to confront systemic oppression. Manjula's story is characterised by her unyielding determination to provide for her family despite the numerous obstacles posed by caste and gender discrimination. This maternal influence not only shapes Gidla's personal identity but also her broader socio-political consciousness, guiding her in her efforts to challenge and dismantle oppressive structures.

## **Feminine Consciousness**

The autobiographies of Gidla and Pawar intricately explore the complexities of feminine consciousness within the context of caste and gender oppression. They reflect on societal expectations and the ways in which these norms influence their identities as Dalit women. Pawar's exploration of feminine consciousness delves into the intersections of caste and gender, highlighting the unique struggles faced by Dalit women in navigating multiple layers of oppression. Gidla similarly reflects on her experiences as a Dalit woman, critiquing the oppressive gender norms imposed on women in Indian society. Through their narratives, both authors underscore the need for intersectional approaches to understanding and addressing social injustices, advocating for the empowerment and liberation of marginalised communities. They try to redefine femininity that encompasses strength and agency.

Pawar's autobiography intricately explores the theme of feminine consciousness. She reflects on how gender roles and societal expectations have impacted her life and relationships. By recounting her personal experiences and those of other Dalit women, Pawar provides a nuanced understanding of the struggles and triumphs associated with feminine identity. Gidla's memoir similarly explores the ways in which her experiences as a Dalit woman have shaped her understanding of femininity and gender. She reflects on societal expectations and how they have influenced her life choices and identity. Gidla's narrative is a critique of the oppressive gender norms imposed on women, particularly Dalit women, and underscores her efforts to challenge and subvert these expectations. Through her reflections, Gidla provides insights into the intersectional challenges faced by Dalit women and the resilience required to navigate them.

Gidla explores the complexities of memory and its relationship to identity. She reflects on her childhood in India, recounting the ways in which her experiences have shaped her understanding of herself and her place in the world. Gidla's narrative is a powerful testament to the impact of memory on personal and collective identity formation, highlighting the enduring influence of past experiences on present realities.

The socio-political environment of Andhra Pradesh is portrayed, where her family's experiences are deeply intertwined with the broader history of caste oppression. Her memories of growing up in an untouchable family helps the readers to understand the pervasive and systemic nature of caste-based discrimination.

These recollections are not merely nostalgic reflections but critical examinations of how historical injustices continue to shape contemporary identities and social structures.

Pawar delves into the theme of memory by recollecting her childhood and early life in India. She reflects on how these experiences have profoundly shaped her identity and worldview. Her memories are not just personal recollections but underscores the importance of remembering and documenting the past as a means to understand and challenge the present socio-cultural dynamics.

Pawar's detailed accounts of her early life in Maharashtra provide insights into the harsh realities faced by Dalit communities, particularly women. By documenting her personal history, Pawar not only preserves her own experiences but also those of countless Dalit women who have endured similar struggles. This act of remembrance becomes a powerful tool for resistance and empowerment, fostering a collective identity among marginalised women.

### **Analysis of Maternal Influence in Marginalised Women's Stories**

Marginalised women's stories portray mothers as affectionate as well as strong and determinant. They offer a source of support for their daughters, helping them to fight against injustice. This shared memory helps daughters to live with confidence as they see living examples of resilience, courage, and determination before them. These narratives create a space for the emancipation of future generations, giving voice to the suppressed in order to articulate and redefine them.

The select texts illustrate how maternal figures serve as both personal and political role models for their daughters. By recounting their mothers' stories, the authors highlight the intergenerational transmission of resilience and resistance. This maternal influence is not merely a source of personal strength but also a catalyst for broader social change. The stories of Laxmi and Manjula provide a template for understanding how marginalised women navigate and challenge oppressive systems, offering a vision of collective empowerment and solidarity.

The process of identity formation in girls is intricately linked to their attachment to and identification with their mothers. For Gidla and Pawar, their mothers' experiences as Dalit women in a caste-ridden society become central to their understanding of their own identities. This continuous attachment and identification help them navigate their paths and define their roles within their communities. The maternal influence in

their lives underscores the importance of the mother-daughter relationship in shaping the feminine consciousness.

In both narratives, the mothers' stories function as guides, offering wisdom and strategies for coping with and challenging oppressive structures. These autobiographies highlight how the mothers' lived experiences become a source of strength and guidance for their daughters. Gidla and Pawar portray their mothers as active agents of social change, whose resilience and unbreakable spirits in the face of adversity become lessons in resistance and survival. Their mother's stories acts as their guide and an agent of social change, in both the narratives taken for analysis.

Dalit women, while narrating their past, simultaneously negotiate a direction for the future. The autobiographies of Gidla and Pawar demonstrate how the mothers' stories provide a pedestal on which the daughters build their own narratives. By recounting their mothers' struggles and triumphs, they not only honor their legacies but also carve out pathways for future generations of Dalit women to follow. This negotiation of the future through the lens of the past is a recurring theme that underscores the continuity and evolution of feminine consciousness across generations.

The resilience and unbreakable spirit of the mothers in both autobiographies serve as a crucial source of knowledge for Dalit women. Gidla and Pawar illustrate how their mothers' unwavering determination in the face of socio-economic hardships becomes a beacon of hope and a repository of survival strategies. This resilience is depicted as an invaluable asset that empowers Dalit women to confront and overcome adverse circumstances, thereby fostering a sense of agency and self-efficacy.

Pawar's autobiography intricately explores the theme of feminine consciousness. She reflects on how gender roles and societal expectations have impacted her life and relationships. By recounting her personal experiences and those of other Dalit women, Pawar provides a nuanced understanding of the struggles and triumphs associated with feminine identity. She challenges patriarchal biases and advocates for a redefinition of woman that encompasses power and agency.

Pawar's exploration of feminine consciousness is deeply rooted in her experiences of navigating a patriarchal and caste society. Her reflections on gender roles highlight the intersections between caste and gender, illustrating how these social constructs work together to marginalise Dalit women. By documenting her journey of self-discovery and empowerment, Pawar challenges dominant narratives and offers a reimagined vision of femininity that is inclusive and empowering.

Gidla's memoir similarly explores the ways in which her experiences as a Dalit woman have shaped her understanding of femininity and gender. She reflects on societal expectations and how they have influenced

her life choices and identity. Gidla's narrative critiques the oppressive gender norms imposed on women, particularly Dalit women, and underscores her efforts to challenge and subvert these expectations. Through her reflections, Gidla provides insights into the intersectional challenges faced by Dalit women and the resilience required to navigate them.

Gidla's exploration of feminine consciousness is marked by her critical engagement with both gender and caste discrimination. Her narrative reveals the dual burdens carried by Dalit women, who must contend with both patriarchal oppression and caste-based exclusion. By highlighting her own struggles and those of other Dalit women, Gidla underscores the need for intersectional approaches to understanding and addressing social injustices. Her memoir serves as a powerful critique of the systemic barriers that Dalit women face and a call to action for greater solidarity and collective resistance.

The autobiographies of Gidla and Pawar illustrate how maternal figures serve as both personal and political role models for their daughters. By recounting their mothers' stories, the authors highlight the intergenerational transmission of resilience and resistance. This maternal influence is not merely a source of personal strength but also a catalyst for broader social change. The stories of Laxmi and Manjula provide a template for understanding how marginalised women navigate and challenge oppressive systems, offering a vision of collective empowerment and solidarity.

In conclusion, Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* provide profound insights into the interconnected themes of memory, motherhood, and feminine consciousness in the context of Dalit women's lives. These autobiographies highlight the importance of maternal figures—Laxmi in Gidla's narrative and Manjula in Pawar's—in shaping their daughters' identities and social consciousness. Through the lens of their mothers' resilience and resistance, Gidla and Pawar articulate a vision of empowerment and social change, subverting dominant socio-political narratives and offering a transformative commentary on the potential of memory and motherhood in shaping feminine consciousness. Both Gidla and Pawar employ memory as a tool of resistance, reclaiming their narratives from the erasures of dominant histories. The authors navigate personal and collective memories to assert their agency and challenge the perpetuation of caste-based discrimination. The autobiographies illustrate the complexities of motherhood within the Dalit experience. Motherhood becomes a site of resistance, empowerment, and negotiation as Dalit women navigate societal expectations, economic hardships, and the desire for a better future for their children.

The exploration of motherhood in these Dalit autobiographies underscores the crucial role of maternal influence in both the personal and political realms of Dalit women's lives. The narratives of Laxmi and

Manjula are not only personal stories of struggle and endurance but also powerful testimonies against the oppressive structures of caste and gender. These maternal legacies serve as central pillars in Gidla's and Pawar's autobiographies, deeply influencing their social and political engagements and highlighting the enduring impact of their mothers' stories on the collective consciousness and identity formation of future generations.

By documenting the resilience and resistance of their mothers, Gidla and Pawar contribute significantly to the broader discourse on caste, gender, and social justice. Their autobiographies serve as vital documents in the ongoing struggle for social justice, providing hope and inspiration for marginalised communities. The narratives foreground the stories of their mothers, honouring their legacies and showcasing how these maternal influences become powerful tools for navigating and challenging oppressive structures.

Both autobiographies offer a rich, intersectional perspective on the lives of Dalit women, emphasising the collective power and strength of women in the face of systemic discrimination. The memory of their mothers' stories and the collective bonding among women emerge as threads of emancipation and resistance, illustrating the transformative power of maternal influence and feminine consciousness in the fight against oppression.

In essence, *Ants Among Elephants* and *The Weave of My Life* highlight the centrality of maternal influence in shaping the identities and experiences of Dalit women, serving as powerful tools for documenting and challenging systemic oppression. Through their narratives, Gidla and Pawar advocate for a more inclusive and equitable future, contributing to a broader understanding of the resilience and strength required overcoming systemic barriers. Their works not only honour their maternal legacies but also provide valuable insights and strategies for resistance and empowerment, reinforcing the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality for marginalised communities.

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## **Evolving Urbanscape: Migrant Labour and Spatial Transformations in Kochi**

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### **Abstract**

*In the contemporary pattern of neoliberal urbanisation, the growth of Indian cities is largely attributed to migrant labourers. The city of Kochi, in Kerala, is a prominent example, having experienced a considerable rise in migrant workers from various states, attracted by higher wages and job opportunities. This study investigates the urban spatial transformation of Kochi, driven by the influx of migrant labourers. These workers predominantly engage in construction and other labour-intensive sectors, profoundly influencing Kochi's socio-economic and spatial dynamics. The paper explores how migrant labourers, primarily young and unskilled, have integrated into Kochi's urban fabric, contributing to both physical infrastructure and the development of new spatial practices. Despite facing challenges such as poor living conditions and limited social integration with local populations, migrants have formed resilient communities and social networks that facilitate their adaptation and survival. The study underscores the need for policies that address the welfare of migrant workers and enhance social cohesion, providing a comprehensive understanding of the broader implications of internal migration on urban centres in India.*

**Keywords:** Migrant labour, urbanisation, spatial transformation, everyday life, Kochi

### **Introduction**

Cities are widely recognized as the engines of economic growth. In India, with the introduction of neo-liberal policies, the importance of cities and towns in economic development has been growing. Over the decades, the contribution of urban areas to India's GDP has seen a significant rise, from 29 percent in 1950-51 to 62-63 percent by 2007 (Planning Commission 2008, p. 394) and 60 percent in 2018 (NITI Aayog & ADB 2022, p. 2). The physical expansion and economic growth of Indian cities are largely propelled by internal migration, unlike the cities of developed nations, which is largely growing through international migration (Bhagat 2011, p. 2). It is estimated that there are about 600 million internal migrants in India as of 2020 (Rajan et al. 2020, p.1022). Among these, one-third are interstate and inter-district migrants, totalling

around 200 million. Of these 200 million, approximately two-thirds are believed to be migrant workers (Gupta 2020). Internal migration within India, especially from rural to urban areas, has been influenced by historical regional disparities in development, a legacy of colonial rule (Bhagat 2011, p.5) that intensified post-independence and has accelerated further under neoliberal policies.

In India, the state of Kerala has emerged out as one of the most preferred destinations for migrant workers in the country. The state has seen a substantial influx of migrant laborers from various regions of the country in recent years (Surabhi & Kumar 2007, p. 2). The study conducted by the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation estimates that Kerala has 2.5 million inter-state migrant workers (Narayana et al. 2013, p.18). This figure represents 7 percent of the state's total population (Kumar 2016, p. 2). In the period from 1970s to 1990s migration to Kerala primarily originated from its bordering states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But later on, it has diversified to include migrants from states across India, particularly from the northern, eastern, and northeastern regions. The majority of migrant workers in Kerala come from rural areas of other states and are predominantly unskilled (Kumar 2016, p.5). Most of these migrants are young and have low levels of education. They are engaged in a diverse range of sectors, including construction, casual labour, agriculture and plantation work, road maintenance, and domestic work. Additionally, they work as carpenters, masons, plumbers, and electricians. Beyond these roles, migrant workers are employed in sectors such as jewellery manufacturing, cashew processing, plywood production, flour milling, quarrying, brick making, hospitality, slaughterhouses, and fuel stations.

Factors such as the lack of job opportunities and comparatively low wages in their home states drive these migrants to seek employment in Kerala, attracted by comparatively higher wages and regular work opportunities. Kerala's ability to offer relatively well-paying jobs is attributed to factors such as the active presence of trade unions and influence of communist ideologies, higher wages for unskilled labour, and a shortage of local labour (Kumar 2016, p. 7). Kerala has historically offered higher wages, even when the state was economically less developed. This has been partly due to the significant levels of emigration to the Middle East and other countries, which generated wealth and created job opportunities within Kerala (Moses and Rajan 2012, p.2). The rapid urbanization in Kerala, coupled with the continuous blend between rural and urban areas, plays a significant role in attracting migrant workers. Villagers frequently share information about job prospects in different states, creating a network effect.

Additionally, local employers increasingly favour long-distance migrant workers, offering them better opportunities for occupational mobility. The relative safety for women workers also makes Kerala an appealing destination for migrants (Kumar 2020, p. 14).

Cities are impacted by global competition for investment, new economy industries, and market pressures favouring gentrification and urban regeneration. Consequently, city leaders and developers globally strive to promote their cities as global 'brands'. Migration, when viewed locally, is an integral part of this global restructuring and reimagining of urban life. Along with that the clustering of migrant workers in urban centres and the intricate relationships among them leads to significant transformations in these urban areas. Migrants actively contribute to the restructuring and repositioning of their cities of settlement. They play a crucial role in the reconstitution of daily life, economics, and politics in cities worldwide. However, the impact of migration varies, as cities differ in their participation in and responses to these global trends. Therefore, the effects of migration must be assessed in relation to specific localities (Cagler and Glick Schiller 2011, p. 3).

In this context, the present paper attempts to understand the urban transformation in Kochi due to migrant labour. Kochi, a rapidly developing city in Kerala, has experienced significant socio-spatial changes driven by the influx of migrant workers. This paper explores how the presence of these workers has reshaped the urban landscape, economy, and social dynamics of Kochi, providing insights into the broader implications of migration on urban centres in India.

### **Migrant labourers in Kochi**

Migrant workers have woven themselves into the fabric of Kochi city, permeating every corner with their presence. According to the Census of 2011, Ernakulam district, home to Kochi, recorded the highest number of immigrants from other states in India. In 2001, Ernakulam received 55,977 migrants, with 60 percent originating from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu (Surabhi & Kumar 2007, p. 5). But recent years have witnessed a notable surge in migrant workers flocking to Kochi from various parts of India, drawn by its lucrative labour market offering high wages, abundant job opportunities, and a scarcity of local labour, especially in the construction sector (Antony 2021, p.1).

Historically, labourers from Tamil Nadu have held a significant presence in the construction and fishing industries, representing a substantial portion of the mobile labour force within the district. However, Ernakulam now hosts migrants from a myriad of states known for outward

labour migration. Young men and women from states such as West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and Andhra Pradesh can be found working in various establishments including shops, petrol pumps, restaurants, malls, hospitals, and more. The diversity of migrants' origins is striking, with individuals from far-flung regions like Baramulla in Jammu and Kashmir also joining the workforce in Kochi. Labourers from the countries of Bangladesh and Nepal also seek work in the city.

Nearly all industries in and around the city rely on migrant workers, either directly or indirectly. The hospitality sector in Kochi, textile units in Kizhakkambalam, cement factories situated in Willingdon Island, rice mills operating in Kalady, the furniture manufacturing in Nellikuzhi, fishing operations in Thoppumpady, Munambam, and Vypin, plywood production units in Perumbavoor are among the major clusters in the district that heavily rely on migrant workers for their operations. (Peter and Narendran 2017a, p. 2). The district's granite quarries and crusher units rely heavily on migrant workers for their operations. Workers from Assam, West Bengal and Odisha are commonly found, contributing significantly to the quarrying industry's workforce.

Moreover, significant migration corridors have emerged, such as Nagaon-Ernakulam and Murshidabad-Ernakulam, highlighting the extensive reach and impact of migration on the city. In essence, migrant workers have become integral contributors to Kochi city's economic vitality and cultural diversity, shaping its identity as a dynamic and cosmopolitan hub in Kerala.

### **Everyday life experiences of migrant workers**

Migrant labour makes space in two distinct yet interconnected manners: by providing labour to construct physical spaces like roads, buildings and engendering new spatial practices, interpreting and extracting meaning out of spaces (Aleyamma 2011, p. 165). Migrant labourers in Kochi can be broadly classified into two categories based on how they secure employment. One group works under the supervision of contractors or agents for predetermined periods. The other group, however, seeks employment on a daily basis, congregating at various designated spots in the city, which have effectively become informal labour markets.

The male migrant workers are usually addressed as *bhai* or *annan*, a practice influenced by their origins from either the North/Northeastern parts of India or Tamil Nadu. A typical day of the migrant workers begins early in the morning, as they gather at key locations throughout the

city, waiting for contractors to pick them up and transport them to their respective worksites. Some of the prominent labour market centres include, Kadavanthra Junction, Kaloor, Vathuruthy, Edappally, Thrikakkara and Market Junction on Banerjee Road. These sites are bustling with activity at dawn, with crowds of labourers anticipating the arrival of contractors who will take them to various construction sites and other work locations. To facilitate their employment, workers are typically offered complimentary accommodation and free transportation to the work sites.

The work environment is often harsh, with minimal safety measures and inadequate facilities. The long working hours is another problem faced by the migrant workers in construction. After a long day's work, which can extend well into the evening, they are transported back to their accommodations. In the evenings, the presence of migrant workers becomes particularly evident all across the city. Buses are often filled with these workers, who frequently outnumber local commuters as they return to their places of residence after work. Evenings are typically spent in shared living spaces. The majority of these migrant workers reside in slums or cramped rooms within slum areas, often shared with several other individuals to save on costs. These living conditions are typically overcrowded and lack adequate space and privacy. Despite these hardships, evenings also provide a brief respite where they can socialize with fellow workers, share stories, and maintain a sense of community.

The state offers the highest minimum wage in India for the unorganised sector, standing at an average of Rs 700-800 a day. The Kerala government refers to migrant workers as "guest workers," aiming to offer a respectful designation. However, locals often use broad terms like '*Hindikaaran*' or '*Bengalis*' to describe these workers, reflecting a lack of nuanced understanding. Despite a general tolerance for different religious and ethnic groups, there is minimal social integration between the Keralites and the migrant population. The urban space of Kochi has been modified to some extent to accommodate the needs of migrant workers. For instance, buses now display place names in Hindi to help non-Malayalam speakers navigate the city. Markets stock vegetables and other food items that are staples in the diets of migrant workers. Additionally, local theatres screen Hindi movies on weekends, providing entertainment that resonates with the migrant community.

### **Builders of the city**

The city of Kochi and its surrounding areas have become a major hub for the construction sector in Kerala, heavily reliant on migrant labourers. Migrant workers, encompassing both skilled and unskilled labour, are essential in various construction projects, road works, and other industrial and service-related tasks. Construction projects are underway in every nook and corner of Kochi as part of its rapid and sporadic development. Across these numerous sites, migrant workers are a ubiquitous presence, forming the backbone of the city's construction workforce. Their involvement is critical to the ongoing urban transformation, with their labour visible in a variety of infrastructure projects throughout the city.

Several high-profile government-commissioned projects in Kochi depend on migrant labourers. These include the Kochi Metro Rail, the development of Kochi Refinery, the expansion of Cochin International Airport, and the construction of Information Technology Parks in Kakkanad, as well as the building of roads, national highways, and flyovers. For instance, the Kochi Refinery expansion during 2016-2017 employed over 10,000 migrant workers (Peter and Narendran 2017b, p. 4). They are mainly recruited through intermediaries, while workers employed on smaller construction projects are typically hired from local labour *nakas*, where labourers gather daily in search of employment. Additionally, some of these workers are hired by local contractors as informal employees, often forming long-term working relationships within the local construction ecosystem.

Typically, a large proportion of workers engaged in construction work are young, unmarried men hailing from economically disadvantaged groups in rural areas of various states. From Tamil Nadu, migrants hail from the bordering districts of Dindigul, Theni, the urbanised district of Madurai, and industrial districts such as Salem, Tiruchirappalli, Ariyalur and Dharmapuri. From Andhra Pradesh, workers commonly come from the Anantapur district. West Bengal contributes labourers from Jalpaiguri, Murshidabad, Malda and Nadia districts. In Bihar, the source districts are Buxar, Patna, Purnia and Muzaffarpur, while Uttar Pradesh sends workers from Ballia and Gorakhpur districts. Additionally, Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam as well as Odisha's Rayagada district are notable sources of labour for Kochi's construction sector (Peter and Narendran 2017b, p. 4). Workers for large scale constructions are often mobilized from their home states through a chain of agents, who may occasionally provide advance

payments. While workers from other states are also present, their numbers are relatively smaller. Furthermore, the engagement of women in construction activities is also limited.

Among the employers in Kochi, there is a notable preference for migrant workers over local labour. This preference stems from the perception that migrant workers are more willing to work longer hours, showing greater flexibility and endurance. Additionally, many contractors and employers believe that migrant workers are more obedient and less likely to complain compared to the native workers. This combination of factors makes migrant workers particularly attractive to employers who seek a reliable and compliant workforce for the demanding tasks involved in construction and other sectors.

### **Labour *nakas***

"Naka" is a Hindi term that translates to "junction" in English, which refers to specific locations, often junctions or intersections, where workers gather early in the morning in various towns, seeking employment opportunities. Kochi city and its suburbs host some of the established and long-standing labour *nakas* in the state of Kerala, serving as vital centres where men and women from various parts of India congregate in search of employment opportunities. For more than two decades, labour *nakas* at Kaloor junction and Kadavanthra in the city, have been pivotal gathering points for workers from Tamil Nadu. Over time, they have become ingrained in the urban fabric, symbolizing the enduring presence of migrant labour in Kochi's socio-economic landscape.

Apart from Tamil Nadu, labourers from Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh, as well as Patna and Muzaffarpur districts in Bihar, also frequent these *nakas*, adding to the cosmopolitan character of Kochi's labour market. Neighborhoods such as Thevara, Vathuruthy, Vazhakkala, Edappally, and Thrikkakara also serve as focal points of migrants' gathering in the city. The significance of these labour *nakas* extends beyond mere employment-seeking; they represent spaces of intersection, where diverse communities converge, share experiences, and forge connections amidst the bustling urban environment.

In addition to the labour *nakas* within Kochi city, several other significant hubs exist in neighbouring areas. Angamaly serves as one such focal point, where labourers gather at the point where Main Central Road intersects the National Highway 544. Similarly, in Kalady, another bustling *naka* can be found where Main Central Road intersects with the Malayattur -



Aluva route. In the satellite town of Perumbavoor, the labour *naka* is situated near the Gandhi Circle (Peter and Narendran 2017a, p. 3). These junctions buzzes with activity as workers from various regions converge, seeking employment opportunities and forming connections within the vibrant labour ecosystem.

However, the composition of labourers varies from place to place. While Tamil workers dominate many *nakas*, Bengali-speaking labourers constitute a significant demographic in certain areas, such as Perumbavoor. This diversity of migrant communities contributes to the rich tapestry of cultures and traditions that define Kochi's urban milieu. In essence, labour *nakas* are not merely sites of economic transaction but vibrant spaces where the ethos of migration intersects with the dynamics of urban life, shaping the social fabric of Kochi and its suburbs in profound ways.

### **Residential Pockets**

Kochi city and its suburbs are home to some of the most extensive residential clusters of migrant workers in Kerala. Migrant workers in Kochi tend to concentrate in specific areas of the city. This settlement pattern facilitates the establishment of social networks and the maintenance of linguistic and cultural identities, providing a support system that eases their adaptation to a new environment. Living among people who share similar backgrounds offers migrants the comfort of familiar customs and languages, which can significantly mitigate the challenges of displacement. Another factor contributing to this concentration is the reluctance of local residents to rent out houses to migrants from other states. Cultural differences and concerns about integrating non-local tenants often lead to local homeowners' preference to rent to people from their own community. This reluctance, coupled with the benefits of community support among migrants, results in the formation of densely populated migrant neighborhoods.

Vathuruthy colony on Willingdon Island stands out as the earliest and most expansive cluster, primarily housing workers from Tamil Nadu, though it has recently begun to accommodate migrants from other states as well. Other significant concentrations of Tamil migrants are found in Vazhakkala, Kaloore, Kalamassery, and Pathalam. Luka Colony, located at Edachira, and the Ambalamugal-Karimugal area, near the Kochi Refinery, hosts a substantial number of both skilled and unskilled migrant workers. These workers live in various types of housing, ranging from permanent (pukka) to temporary (kutcha) structures, scattered along the lanes near the refinery. The buildings in front of the Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Limited (FACT),

Kochi Division and at the Karimugal junction provide accommodation for workers involved in the Kochi refinery's major construction works. Additionally, *naka*-based workers reside in Karimugal, with residential facilities extending to Padathikkara on the Karimugal-Pallikkara Road. Meanwhile, workers employed by the Kochi Metro Rail project are accommodated in H.M.T. Colony and near the LNG Terminal located in the coastal area of Puthuvype. Perumbavoor and its surrounding panchayats, are home to an estimated 150,000 migrant workers. These workers come from diverse regions, including various districts of Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam and Bihar. Binanipuram also serves as a significant residential pocket for workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Those employed in industries often live on factory premises, while construction workers typically rent accommodations. Kizhakkambalam is known for housing female migrant workers who are employed in the textile sector. Thevara in Kochi city also hosts migrants from various states. Significant clusters of West Bengal and Assam migrants, including families, can be found in areas like Kandanthara, Vattakkattupady, and Kuttippadam. The furniture workers from Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, predominantly reside in Nellikuzhi. Adivadu, situated near Kothamangalam is another notable residential area for Bengali-speaking workers, primarily single men from Assam and West Bengal. Additionally, gardeners from West Bengal and Odisha, along with their families, live near the Champakkara Canal area, situated in Maradu. These diverse residential clusters illustrate the extensive and varied presence of migrant workers throughout the Ernakulam district, reflecting their integral role in the region's socio-economic fabric.

### **Sunday Markets**

The presence of migrant labourers has significantly altered the socio-economic landscape of Kochi. One of the most notable changes is the emergence of Sunday markets, also known as "bhai bazars," which primarily cater to the needs of migrant workers. A major hub for these markets is Perumbavoor, a satellite town of Kochi. While Perumbavoor hosts the largest of these markets, similar bhai markets have sprung up in other parts of the city, such as the Ernakulam Broadway Market and the roadside stalls along Shanmugham Road on Sundays. These markets, predominantly run by migrants, emerged to address the specific needs of workers from Northern parts of India, becoming vibrant centres of activity every Sunday when labourers, who work tirelessly throughout the week, come to shop and socialize.

These markets serve as crucial meeting points for workers, fostering networks among migrant labourers, contractors, and traders (Aleyamma 2011, p. 166). They also offer spaces for leisure, social interaction, and the remittance of money back to families in their home states. Furthermore, these markets provide a venue for resolving disputes and strengthening social bonds. Informal social relations and networks are integral to the functioning of the Sunday markets, reflecting the casual and temporary nature of the employment and trade practices within them. Elements such as recruitment networks, pavement traders, credit systems, and the sale of pre-used clothes highlight the pervasive informality of these spaces.

A stroll through these markets on a Sunday evening reveals a bustling scene of migrant workers haggling over goods and other migrants selling various items. Key products sold include clothing, Bengali beedis from Murshidabad, khan (a type of chewing pan), and second-hand electronic items. On weekdays, these markets transform into "pick-up points" where contractors arrive with trucks to hire workers for construction sites and quarrying units, emphasizing their central role in the local labour economy.

The market is typically divided into sections based on the workers' origins, such as Bengali, Oriya, and Assamese sections, each offering products native to these regions. This segmentation underscores the strong solidarities forged within the market, based on language, village, and kinship ties. These connections are vital, providing both moral and practical support for the workers. The relationships and networks formed in these markets offer a basis for social protection, highlighting the critical role of informal social and economic relations in the lives of migrant labourers in Kochi.

## **Conclusion**

The urban transformation of Kochi due to the influx of migrant labourers presents a multifaceted phenomenon, significantly impacting the city's socio-economic landscape. Migrant workers have become indispensable to Kochi's economy, particularly in the construction sector, where their labour is fundamental to the city's ongoing infrastructure projects and rapid development. Their presence is not confined to the urban core but extends to various industrial and residential pockets throughout the Ernakulam district. This dispersion underscores their integral role in sustaining the local economy across a range of industries, from hospitality to manufacturing. Despite their essential contributions, migrant workers often

face challenging working and living conditions, reflecting a broader need for policies that ensure their welfare and integration into the social fabric of Kochi.

Moreover, the study highlights the complex interplay between migration and urban transformation in Kochi. The city's response to the needs of migrant workers—through the provision of bilingual signages, culturally relevant food items, and entertainment options—demonstrates a degree of accommodation and adaptation. However, the socio-spatial segregation and minimal integration between migrants and the local population point to persistent challenges. Migrant workers, while integral to the city's economic vitality, continue to navigate a landscape marked by socio-economic disparities and cultural divides. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for formulating policies that not only harness the economic benefits of migration but also promote inclusive urban development and social cohesion. This study, by focusing on the experiences and contributions of migrant labour in Kochi, provides valuable insights into the broader implications of internal migration on urban centres in India.

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**Journey to Liberation: A Queer Study on *Girl, Woman, Other* and *Truth about me: A Hijra Life Story***

**D.Jeeva,**

**Abstract**

*Queer encompasses a diverse range of sexual identities within specific communities. It serves as a comprehensive term for individuals who identify as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and more. For many, 'queer' is a convenient descriptor for this expansive community, challenging traditional gender and sexual distinctions. This shared label fosters solidarity among individuals who come together as a collective movement seeking support and acceptance within society. Interactions between queer and non-queer individuals often raise questions about societal norms, but established social norms are rigid and resist external challenges. The liberation of these forces can only occur through either broader acceptance within the community or persistent efforts from the queer community itself. Gradually, there is a process of liberation unfolding, and writers like A Revathi and Bernardine Evaristo explore the diverse expressions of queerness within socio-cultural contexts. Their discussions examine the impact of cultural and social factors on identities and sexualities, shedding light on the treatment of marginalized groups, including gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals, within the social system. This study aims to examine the select narratives of the semi-autobiographical novel *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo and *Truth about me: A Hijra Life Story*, to uncover the challenges faced by queer individuals in their journey towards liberation.*

**Keywords:** Gender identity, Gender issues, Queer, Queerness, Sexuality, Sexualities.

**Introduction**

The concept of queerness refers to an individual's sense of gender identity that is deeply felt in advance of gender norms. A person's gender expression should be acknowledged by society, but there have been times in history when the '*Queer*' have been viewed as different, strange, immoral, and unacceptable. In the 16th century, homosexual relationships in England were considered a criminal offence punishable by death.

"A survey of the English laws produced in Latin in 1290, during the reign of Edward I, (9) mentions sodomy, so described because the crime was attributed to the men of Sodom

who thereby attracted the wrath of the Lord and the destruction of their city. (10) In another description of the early English criminal laws, written a little later in Norman French, the punishment of burning alive was recorded for ‘sorcerers, sorceresses, renegades, sodomists and heretics publicly convicted’. (11) Sodomy was perceived as an offence against God’s will, which thereby attracted society’s sternest punishments.” (Michael Kirby, 2013, 61-82)

Religious deprecations played a significant role in the oppression of queer individuals and communities during the period. Following the initiation of the gay liberation movement, lesbians and other genders became more aware of their identities and sexualities. As a result of the founding of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee in Berlin in 1897, homosexual and bisexual men and women gained a voice. In the subsequent years, people became more open about their identities and sexual orientations.

The first person to identify as using the phrase ‘*Queer Theory*’ was Teresa De Lauretis in her essay ‘*Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*,’ published in 1991. She used it to serve as the title of a conference that she organised at the University of California, where she is a Professor of The History of Consciousness. She edited a special issue of the feminist cultural studies journal *Differences* titled ‘*Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*’. She wrote, “the project of the conference was based on the speculative premise that homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or homology. In other words, it is no longer to be seen as merely transgressive or deviant vis-à-vis a proper, natural sexuality.” (Teresa De Lauretis, 1991, 3.2)

The text that is considered the most influential in the field of queer studies is Michel Foucault’s ‘*The History of Sexuality*,’ published in the year 1978. In this he states “As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (Michel Foucault, 1985, 42).

Alexander Doty states that “Judith Butler and Sue-Ellen Case have argued that queerness is something that is ultimately beyond gender—it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism.” (Alexander Doty, 1993, 16)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's '*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*' is a very important study in 1985. These works contributed towards the establishment of queer representation from society and provided essential understanding of the apprehensions of various sexualities and sexual identities.

## Literature Review

Research has investigated the representation of queer identities in literary works. Queer potential is revealed in realistic novels through characters' interactions with same-sex desires. Scholars have examined the emotional labour associated with various aspects of identity within the context of queer culture. Researchers have also explored the relationship between consumer capitalism and gay and lesbian subcultures in contemporary fiction. Scholarly papers have delved into the examination of identities across time and cultures through the lens of queer theory. These papers have also examined the various aspects of queer popular culture, including the construction of culture and identity through textual experience and nostalgic representations of queerness. This study aims to examine the select narratives of the semi-autobiographical novels by Bernardine Evaristo and Revathi A in light of the queer theory. In this regard the paper probes to answer the following questions:

1. How do the characters resist societal norms related to queerness?
2. Do the communities provide support, acceptance, or isolate the queer?

## Research Method

The methodology utilised in this study was a qualitative investigation of the chosen novels by Bernardine Evaristo and Revathi A. This research study employs a thematic analysis and examines the perception of queer individuals in society. The objective of this study is to explore the depiction of queer identities in literature and to understand how it allows them to embark on a journey toward liberation.

## The Journey: Megan to Morgan and Other Stories

Bernardine Evaristo and Revathi A, explores the different avenues of queerness within the socio-cultural



structure. They express the cultural, social, and political aspects of queerness. They illustrate how the marginalized Gays, Lesbians, and Transgender are treated in the social structure.

Bernardine Evaristo opens her novel with her protagonist, Amma, a lesbian and followed by all the major female characters in the novel. Dominique, a good friend of Amma's who is also a lesbian, Morgan, identifies as gender-free, Bibi, a Trans woman and Morgan's partner, and Omofe, Bummi's female lover, as they all possess unusual sexual orientations. All the characters represent the restricted forms of sexualities and identities and deal with their identity in their ways. Every character explores the physiological and psychological transformation as they deal with their identities.

Amma's husband left her when he finds out about her lesbian identity. Her daughter Yazz, studying at University was supportive of her as she was an open-minded and socially concerned personality. Amma and her friend Dominique struggled to establish themselves as playwrights. Amma wanted to stage her first play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* an important story about the lesbians that she has had for more than ten years. Her struggle to find theaters in London becomes very painful and she becomes aware of the gender discrepancies prevalent in the society that always favored men over women. This play *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* connects all the other characters on the opening day of the play at the National Theater.

Amma is self-proclaimed, a single mother with the vision to be a great playwright. She has strong opinions about things that interested her. She joined an orthodox drama school where she was politicized and she questioned everything that bothered her, which resulted in elimination from the drama school. Amma and Dominique decided to start a theatre company on their own because they found it difficult to find theatres to stage their dramas as women and in particular lesbians.

She was an independent woman, after leaving her husband she never had any steady relationship, her friends suggested that 'she take up therapies' and warned her of old age and companionship. But she wanted to live her life to the fullest alone. As a single mother facing all the troubles and trying to establish herself in society is painstaking. Amma's only emotional support is her daughter Yazz, she loves her very much, and she believes that Yazz is the miracle she wanted in life. Her struggles, social discrimination, and physical and mental suffering for decades become a mist when she stages her play *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* at the National Theater. She was the first one to do so because it was an achievement for her.

Dominique observed her physical changes and she is very much aware of her sexual preferences from puberty. She wisely kept them to herself, unsure of how her friends or family would react; she feared not wanting to be a social outcast. She feared for society and did not want to be an outcast, so she tried her best to live normally like dating men. After realizing that she was more attracted to women, she found few

relationships, worked out in a few relationships, and later found herself in a tangled relationship with Nzinga. That relationship ended in violence against her. Amma tried to save her from Nzinga but she refused because she loved her deeply.

The contrasting aspects that Amma finds when she meets Dominique in America from London are drastic. In London, people saw Dominique as tough and self-sufficient but in America she was weak, frightened, and submissive. Her relationship with Nzinga has taught her about making choices in life, that violent relationship left deep wounds in her, physically and mentally. After leaving Nzinga, she tries to become herself again and she becomes an activist who supports and motivates victims of sexual harassment to lead a free and healthy life.

Megan/Morgan, from a young age, preferred boys' clothes over girls. She finds it easy to wear, and comforting where she always was identified as a tomboy. However, her mother forced femininity on her. The fraught relationship between Morgan and her mother illustrates the complexities of gender expression and societal expectations. Morgan's feelings about not wearing girls' clothes, shows her clothing choices are influenced by both personal identity and external pressures. Morgan, grapples with the influence of family on their choices. The dynamics within their family significantly impact their decisions, especially concerning clothing and gender expression. Her mother imposes traditional gender norms and expectations on them. 'wearing trousers really shouldn't have been an issue for a girl born in her time, but her mother wanted her to look cuter than she already was like the cutest of the cutest cutie – pies' (Bernardine Evaristo, 2019, 308) Despite her innate tomboyish identity, her mother insists on femininity. Morgan's mother involves her husband to enforce her to dress up and play with Barbie dolls. Morgan finds it difficult to endure this enforcement on her. Her mother wants her to be socially available as a female. As a 'female – ness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms.' (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 701)

This pressure molds Morgan's choices, leading to internal conflict and a struggle to reconcile their true self with societal norms. As she grows older, they seek independence and autonomy. Their defiance against their mother's expectations becomes a form of rebellion. Clothing becomes a battleground where Morgan asserts her individuality and challenges the status quo. As Foucault asserts, 'Where there is power, there is resistance.' (Michel Foucault, 1985, 95). This statement highlights the inherent struggle between those who wield power and those who resist it. She grapples with acceptance both self-acceptance and acceptance from their family. But her grandmother GG was supportive of her; she always tried to save her from all these troubles and sufferings. Later when she is all grown up she still wore men's dresses but not for comfort. She naturally felt fit that men's dresses. She felt powerful, and 'loved that men didn't eye her up

anymore, which was liberating' (Bernardine Evaristo, 2019, 312). But society posed its norms on her, and questioned her, even from her school days. Students called her the butchest and the ugliest girl in the classroom. This name calling and bullying always wounded her deeply. She felt like she became a laughing stock for the whole class and which resulted in her quitting the school.

Her parents worried for her and tensions built at home whenever she raised her voice against them. They were supportive of her as well at times, but not for her identity but her attitude. Her mother said 'we can work things out, we love you, we really love you, Megan, talk to us' when Megan decides to leave her parents on a random day. She finds Bibi on social media and entangles a relationship with her. Later finds that Bibi is a transwoman, born as Gopal and later done with the sex change procedure and becomes Bibi. They shared feelings for each other and they loved each other. Megan thought about changing her sex but deeply believed that she was gender-free as she says that 'being born female isn't the problem, society's expectations are, I get this now and I'm so glad I didn't go down the sex change route' (Bernardine Evaristo, 2019, 325). Megan becomes a sensation and influencer in social media. She addresses gatherings at events, and even delivers a speech at a university in Norfolk. From tomboy to gender-free, Megan's identity is shaped by her exposures and experiences. She becomes a person from following someone on social media to someone who is being followed.

### **The Journey: Doraiswamy to Revathi**

The novel *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, an autobiography written by A Revathi in Tamil as '*Unarvum Uruvamum*' and translated into English by V. Geetha. Revathi discusses about the troubles and struggles of transgenders. The story opens at the setting of a small village in Namakkal, Tamilnadu where Doraiswamy (Revathi) was born as a boy with feminine qualities. In his early school days, Doraiswamy showed more interest in playing games that are played by girls. His biological and psychological changes caused him to disguise himself as a girl by wearing his sister's dress playfully, and his family treated it as a funny act.

Doraiswamy's gender struggle started as early as the village people started to talk about his attitude. His friends and neighbours were using foul language calling him Number Nine, Pottai or Girly. He ignored all such comments and sometimes liked inwardly to be called or recognized as one. He acted in a drama as Chandramathi, and danced so well that showing his deeper feelings on stage as a complete woman. This sense of turmoil between a boy and a girl always troubled him. Even prayed to God why he made him like this. This was the question she often asked herself. Throughout the story, this question of identity was raised and caused the transition.

Duraiswamy's biological changes in his body and mind moved him towards the hijra community that he had come across at a temple and he developed a kind of friendship, bond with them and he very much sensed belongingness. This belongingness later persuades him to dress up as a woman and this transition of a boy dressing up as girl is seen as insanity that leads to abandoning his family. The completeness that he sensed in the woman's dress leads him to take his life-changing decision that is having 'nirvaana' castration done on him, because the physical and mental turmoil that he goes through not becoming a complete woman pained him more as he decides to change his identity. He was very firm on his decision when the doctor asked him, 'Do you want me to arrange things so that you can pee like women do from below, or as men do from above? I want to live as a woman, which is why I wanted this operation' (Revathi A & Geetha V, 2010, 73). His true identity is completely transformed as 'he' becomes 'she' and when Duraiswamy becomes Revathi.

After the sex change operation, she visited her family as a woman. She did visit them once after absconding to Mumbai when her brother beat her to death. But now she was affirmed to reassure her identity as a woman. Her brother was about to thrash her but was stopped by her father. Her mother cried and wished she was dead. 'I thought you were dead. Would that it was true! What is this guise you've come in' and fainted? Later recovering she said 'Is it not enough that all of us born as women suffer?' (Revathi A & Geetha V, 2010, 114) Shows how deeply gender discrimination has impacted. Because giving birth to a girl child was seen as sin in the early days in villages and she feared very much for her son's sex change. Later mostly fearing the villagers' abuse she said, 'What'll the world say?... Do you think we can walk with our heads held high in the village anymore?' (Revathi A & Geetha V, 2010, 115). She threatens her emotionally. These emotional enforcements are battle that Revathi had to endure to become what she always wanted to become.

Fortunately, her sister accepts the fact he has changed his sex because of his natural urge. She takes him as a woman. She makes her child call her, aunty and shared sarees and jewels with her. This acceptance and assurance has given her the keys to the cage she was captivated. For her wearing a saree was liberation because her experience of being trapped inside men's clothing as a transgender woman is deeply poignant. Imagine the weight of societal expectations, the discomfort of ill-fitting garments, and the emotional struggle of living in a body that doesn't align with one's true identity. She felt relieved and complete in her woman's clothing.

She experiences a profound sense of liberation wearing this sarees. This profound liberation can be observed in her detailed descriptions about wearing sarees. The moments that she completely enjoyed in her quiet room, she stands before the mirror and there lies the saree, a vibrant canvas waiting to be worn.

She reaches for it, fingers trembling with anticipation and passion. She felt the fabric whispering secrets of resilience, defiance, and authenticity. As she wraps the saree around her waist, each fold becomes a declaration, a clear declaration of her soul. She felt like pleats telling her stories of the weight of centuries, the resilience of countless women who defied norms. She gazed at her reflection, her curves, and her contours in the mirror. For the first time, she sees herself as a woman, a complete woman as she was meant to be.

Her family accepted her eventually. Her father accepted it as her destiny. She was also received warmly by villagers as she visits temples on auspicious days with her family and relatives. After the sex transformation, Revathi found herself more interested in leading a normal family life, like others with a husband and children, even though she cannot have children of her own. She married a man who believed in equality and peace. She led a happy life as she dreamed of, but it did not last forever. Again she was thrown into sex work and other works. She suffered her whole life, and for the most part, she prayed and vexed about her birth. She suffered physically and mentally, this sex work and her personal life drained her energy drastically.

After reuniting with her family her parents did not hesitate to take her money to rebuild their house but did not allow her to live with them because her brothers would create tantrums. Revathi used to send money to her father as her father wanted to build a house for themselves and her. But when she left sex work and joined an organization for sexual minorities as an employee, she used to have less money as a salary and could not send money to her father anymore. So, her father got angry and wanted to give the property to his daughter and eldest son. After lots of fights, Revathi got a share of her house. Unfortunately, a hijra can't get a share of her property, but her family can take her money. A family can't accept a Hijra as a woman or take her responsibility, but they have no problem taking her hard-earned money. All these issues surrounding her make her a sex worker again. In most transgender cases acceptance and support from the family was seen as an undeniable issue.

She favored drinking again and even started in the early mornings. During these difficult times people were supportive of her were her hijra community. She had three hijra daughters, Mayuri, the eldest, Famila, and Rithu (chelas) who were very fond of her and she loved them dearly. She never asked them to do the works that she has done as a daughter to her hijra mothers. She faced criticism for that but she asserted everyone that times have changed. She believed that educated girls like her daughters would uplift their community.

She was investigating new opportunities with the support of Sangama, working as an office assistant. She acquired knowledge about various sexual orientations, identities, and orientations. She was thrilled to have

the chance to work there, as it allowed her to emulate other women who pursued careers and contributed to society. Although she experienced happiness during this phase of her life, it was short-lived. The passing of her chela, Famila, impacted her, but her guru's death had an even greater effect on her. Despite the difficulties she faced in her life, she demonstrated courage and perseverance, and she did not give up. Eventually, she returned to Sangama to contribute to her community and society once again. Presently she works as an activist and prominent figure in the queer community, representing the queer identity.

## Conclusion

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the portrayal of queer characters and their queer identities through a comparative analysis of the works of two writers. These novels illustrate the impact of social norms on an individual's sexual identity as the characters mature and acquire various identities. The research investigates the queer identities by comparing the works of two writers who portray queer characters and their identities. These novels demonstrate how societal norms influence individuals' sexual identities, as the characters mature, they acquire a variety of identities, or in other words, their journey gives them new identities. Additionally, the authors emphasise the significance of acknowledging and accepting queerness and gender expression in society, as it has become an integral part of our culture. Furthermore, acceptance of queer identities has cultural, economic, and political importance, and it would transform the way queer people are represented throughout the world.

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## Caste and the Construction of a Hindu Nationalist Social Imaginary in the Anti-Brahmo Novels of Indranath Bandyopadhyay

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### Abstract

*Indranath Bandyopadhyay, a leading ideologue of the late nineteenth century Hindu Revivalism in Bengal routinely satirised the western educated, reformist Bengalis, primarily the Brahmos for their adoption of western ideas, particularly with regards to women's emancipation and caste discrimination. Besides numerous short satirical sketches, Indranath wrote two novels Kalpataru (1874) and Kshudiram (1888) in which he not only targeted the Brahmo social ideals, but also set up a binary between the figures of the errant Brahmo and the model Brahmin in order to project an alternative vision of the ideal Hindu nation. In this paper I will look at the intricacies of the creation of this fundamentalist nationalist social imaginary and examine how it can inform our understanding of Hindu nationalism.*

**Keywords:** Hindu Revivalism, Brahmoism, casteism, Brahminical hegemony, Bengali satire

Sinners and criminals wherever found  
In the world of angels, heaven or hell  
In the world of the *nags* or of mortal men  
“Are Brahmos all!” The verses expound.  
O what Fancy! A novelty really!  
All hail Panchananda, All hail Kali!<sup>1</sup>

(Dhurjati 1886, 56)

The above lines from the mock epic poem *Ekadash Avatar*, sum up the essential quality of the satires of Indranath Bandyopadhyay or Panchananda, the pseudonym under which he published satirical sketches in the comic magazine of the same name. For Indranath Bandyopadhyay, one of the foremost members of the extremist faction of the late nineteenth century Hindu revivalists, even if everything bad was not done by the Brahmos, everything done by the Brahmos was bad. An anti-progressive, orthodox Brahmin to the core, Bandyopadhyay privileged scriptural wisdom over empirical evidence, reason and even conscience. In an essay called ‘Jatibhed’ (Caste Distinctions) he writes, ‘what the *shastras* say can never be wrong. Empirical knowledge is often erroneous. But there is no danger of finding errors in the *Vedas* and other scriptural



authority. Whoever does not believe this can be anything but a Hindu' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 914). As a result, every orthodox custom of Hinduism including such social ills as casteism, subordination of women, restrictions for widows were held up by him as sacrosanct practices. As Suniti Ranjan Roy Chowdhury remarks: 'Indranath was a supporter of the extremely conservative position held by Shashadhar Tarkachudamani regarding caste system, the superiority of Brahmins, the primacy of religious doctrine and so on. ... [This] led him to become an enemy of the Muslims, Christians and Brahmos' (Roy Chowdhury 1960, 115).

Indranath's nationalism is essentially an orthodox Hindu nationalism characterised by an extreme distaste for the British rule as well as the western educated Indian elite whose patriotism he considered suspect, and a chauvinistic idealisation of the Brahminical Hindu past and the Brahmin as a role model worthy of emulation. In the words of Amiya P. Sen, 'The roots of social philosophy in respect of ... Indranath lie in their unflinching belief in the rigid, hierarchical ordering of Hindu society in which obviously the supremacy of the Brahman assumes a pivotal importance' (Sen 1993, 257). In this paper I will examine how Indranath Bandyopadhyay uses anti-Brahmo satire in his novels *Kalpataru* (1874) and *Kshudiram* (1888) in order to ultimately reinforce a casteist and patriarchal orthodox morality and thereby projects a retrogressive, Brahminical social imaginary as a radical alternative to western colonial modernity.

The novel *Kalpataru* (1874), 'the first full-fledged satirical novel in Bengali' (Dutta 2013, 218), presents a young Brahmo man named Narendranath Ghatak as the protagonist whose illicit affair with a married *kulin* woman and its consequences constitute the central incident of the story. Narendranath, a young man in the final year of his undergraduate studies and a Brahmo convert tries to court the widowed sister in law of his neighbour Atal Bapantabagish under the garb of promoting women's emancipation. However, Narendranath's desire to 'improve society...by marrying a widow' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 22) cannot proceed further as Bapantabagish gets a whiff of the affair and he has to flee to a village. The new identity of schoolmaster cum physician that he assumes in the village brings him in contact with Bimala, the forty eighth wife of a *kulin* man, who lives with her mother and younger brother. Soon a clandestine affair develops between Narendranath and Bimala under the ruse of medical treatment and the two elope. On the way to Calcutta Narendranath leaves Bimala at the home of a Vaishnava ascetic where a female devotee and companion of the ascetic helps her get an abortion. However, it is later revealed that the child was not Narendranath's when Bimala confesses in her dying declaration that 'disregarding virtue and righteousness she had nurtured a living sin inside her womb. Later realising that Narendranath was a naive man she used

her charms to entice him and incited him to elope with her so that she could go to Calcutta' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 94). Hence, even in calling out Narendranath as a scoundrel the author appears to be absolving him of real responsibility. He is more of a misdirected youth radicalised by the harmful Brahmo ideology and duped by a crafty woman, rather than a real villain. It appears that the author's Brahminical and patriarchal bias cannot countenance the total vilification of his Brahmin protagonist who thus needs to be presented as a victim of Brahmo indoctrination and female manipulation. This authorial double standard is also seen at work in the author's transferring of the responsibility of Bimala's death to Narendranath's scheme of elopement from the actual responsibility of the institution of *kulin* polygamy which has led Bimala to such a pass where the sex starved woman intentionally or unintentionally becomes the victim of some predatory man.

Besides the Brahmo liberalism, the two other factors which appear to be responsible for Bimala's death are the fake asceticism of the Vaishnava Shreerupdas Bairagi and the lecherousness of the landlord Seetanath Babu. Vaishnavism's rejection of the rigidity of mainstream hierarchical Brahminical Hinduism makes it a natural target. Shreerupdas, the ascetic in whose hermitage Narendranath and Bimala seek shelter on their way to Calcutta lives with three female attendants and whenever he preached he would 'especially teach the women devotees the true path of devotion' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 70). Thus, the Vaishnava faith of loving devotion and the Brahmo creed of women's liberation both surreptitiously promote licentiousness in the garb of devotion or social reform.

Seetanath Ghosh whose desire for Bimala eventually leads to her death derived his wealth from a railway contract and thus represents the class of colonial compradors, a product of the colonial incursion in the traditional Bengali society. If Brahmoism's affiliation with western liberalism has corrupted Narendranath, the sudden influx of wealth through colonial collaboration has led to the creation of the lecherous class of babus represented by Seetanath. It is thus, the Brahmo, the Vaishnava and the babu—all belonging outside the social imaginary of the mythic ideal of the Brahminical society—who become the cause of the Brahmin woman's scandal and subsequent death. Thus, by extension the present age itself with its evil influences becomes the ultimate cause of Bimala's death. 'What was the cause of such providence? It is the signs of the time and place to which she belonged; and not the doings of a man. ... None among these three is the real cause of Bimala's death' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 94).

What exactly the author means by the signs of the time appears to be a disregard for and transgression of one's prescribed role and station (*jatidharma*) in the Brahminical social order either through external influence like western culture (Brahmo liberalism) or internal dissenting forces like Vaishnavism. In an essay called 'Jati Manina Keno?' using the metaphor of fresh, stale and fermented rice Indranath writes: 'Our prescribed caste duties (*jatidharma*) have to be kept fresh and thriving... It seems that since the Islamic times we have forgotten to keep it warm and fresh... Now, the Christian catalyst has fermented it into alcohol that intoxicates minds of the Hindus. ... Can they maintain their proper roles anymore?' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 878) It is precisely in this inability to live according to the inherent nature and role of one's caste (which the author argues in the same essay to be natural intrinsic attributes Hindu people are born with) that one may locate the primary problem with all the morally defective characters in the novel.

Though the primary target of the satire is Narendranath whose willing defection from the orthodox Brahminical Hindu lifestyle is by far the most audacious transgression, other more traditionally Brahmin characters like Ramdas and Gobesh also do not escape Indranath's criticism for their inability to live up to the ideal nature dictated by the *sattva gun* that defines a Brahmin. The inherent Brahminhood has to be cultivated, as the author argues in his essay 'Dharma Parichay,' 'If there is a deficiency of common righteousness in a Brahmin, then it has to be accepted that in spite of being born to a Brahmin family his Brahminhood has decayed, or at least faded. ... if he has at least as much righteousness as a Christian, then he still retains his humanity, but has lost his Brahminhood' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 844). If Ramdas' indulgence in the lowly instincts or *tama guns* makes him an imperfect Brahmin, it is Gobesh's aspiration to be and the imitation of the *bhadralok babu* marked by his 'indolence despite indigence' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 36) that makes him a bad Brahmin. Hence, despite being Brahmins these characters do not strictly observe the *jatidharma* of the Brahmin and hence fail as ideal role models. However their lapses are depicted more as follies than real vices which are reserved for the Brahmo Narendranath.

In opposition to the wayward Brahmins and the degenerate Brahmo Narendranath, the author upholds his brother, the traditional rustic Brahmin, Madhusudan as some sort of moral ideal. Madhusudan as the dutiful elder son leaves his studies after the untimely demise of his father to take up the responsibility of his young brother and widowed aunt. Having received some elementary education in the village school he has no exposure to the corrupting western education. Though, being a businessman, he does not follow the traditional vocation of his caste, he maintains a traditional lifestyle far removed from the westernised life of his younger brother who out of shame introduces him to his friends as servant. However, the good

Madhusudan takes every pain to sponsor his ungrateful brother's education. In contrast to the lustful Narendranath Madhusudan's almost celibate indifference for physical desire and the uncomplaining equanimity with which he accepts Narendranath's usurpation of their paternal property may be interpreted as an indication of the *sattva gun*, the quintessential quality of the Brahmin caste. Quite expectedly the good Brahmin Madhusudan is rewarded at the end of the novel and ends up becoming a successful businessman who also reforms the indolent Gobesh and makes him the supervisor of his estate. The justness of the conclusion should not be looked for in its logical probability (throughout the novel Madhusudan's business had been debt-ridden and he showed little business acumen), but in the moral project of the author for whom Madhusudan is the exemplum of virtue. At the conclusion of the novel the narrator remarks, 'Narendranath has shown us so much. Seeing all these we feel like calling him *kalpataru* (the wish granting tree of the *Puranas*) because there is almost nothing which does not exist in him' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 103). This transferring of blame upon the Brahmo Narendranath, who suddenly turns into the *kalpataru* (presumably of all conceivable vices), appears to be a wilful evasion or erasure of the vices of the other characters, in which the rationality of the conclusion is superseded by its expediency to the ideology of the author. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay comments on the absurdity of this conclusion raising questions about the author's sanity who 'could not maintain the equilibrium of logic in many places because the twin ghosts of orthodox Hindu lifestyle (*garhasthya dharma*) and caste divisions (*varnashram*) had taken control of his mind' (Bandyopadhyay 2002, 96). Hence, according to the rationale of the text Brahmos are necessarily sinful, Brahmins who do not cultivate their inherent Brahmin nature are affected by folly, but not really sinners and the Brahmins like Madhusudan who adhere to the dictates of Brahminical faith are the exemplary characters to be emulated by the readers.

This dichotomy between the bad Brahmo and good Brahmin is reinforced in *Kshudiram* (1888), in which even the little gullibility granted to the Brahmo Narendranath is denied to the more hardened Brahmos. The plot of the novel is rather slight and deals with the protagonist Kshudiram, the son of a fisher woman who spends all her earnings to get her son educated in the Western mode. Kshudiram graduates and becomes a civilised Brahmo *bhadralok* and begins to detest the backward ways of his mother whom he shuns. He lives in a rented house with a few other friends, has conversations about god, conscience and righteousness with his Brahmo friend Bhusibhojon Ray who has married a widowed woman, thinks about the sorry plight of his maid servant, and finally goes to a Brahmo meeting where he ends up marrying a widow. Meanwhile

the reader is introduced to his Brahmin cook whose detailed back story and present actions are upheld as the supreme examples of virtue that is absent in the lives of the Brahmo protagonist and his friends.

The emphasis on the maintenance of caste roles (*jatidharma*) and the superiority of the Brahmins as the means to alleviate the problems of society is reiterated in the novel where a major reason that makes the Brahmo Kshudiram and Bhushibhojon the targets of satire is their urge to conceal their caste identity and thereby transgress their assigned role in the Hindu social hierarchy by becoming *bhadraloks*. From the very beginning Kshudiram's shame and dissatisfaction with his caste and family background is sarcastically treated by the narrator: 'Kshudiram's ancestors were *Kaivartas*... This is the reason Kshudiram was disgusted with the world' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 133). Kshudiram's rant that follows further paints him as an absurd fool. 'If I had any hand in this before birth I would never have taken birth in the *Kaivarta* family' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 133). In contrast, when Khudiram grumbles about the thoughtlessness of his father in not making enough money to allow him transcend his caste identity ('Money can help one mask one's caste' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 135)) and make him a *bhadralok*, he is envisaging the then contemporary definition of the *bhadralok* as 'an aristocracy which is not born, but may be made' (Mukherjee 1977, 31) a social group whose prestige was derived not by virtue of their caste but virtue of their power or wealth amassed through their English education and affiliation with the colonial hegemony, as S. N. Mukherjee points out. This dissolution of caste based entitlement to the status of *bhadralok* is more explicitly condemned by the narrator. 'Whether he is Ray or Majumdar or Badyopadhyay or Ghosh or Jola or Jugi no one knows and no one cares. As per the rules of the civilisation which has been specially imported from England to be curious about one's caste is a great crime. ... If one has to hide one's caste or feels ashamed of one's lineage, the easiest way is to become a babu' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 143).

Thus, in the opinion of the author, caste as a determinant of social status has been replaced by cultural imitation of or political/economic collaboration with the colonial machinery. Characters like Kshudiram try to benefit from this redefinition of the *bhadralok* which grant them the social mobility earlier denied to their castes by pursuing western education and joining the reformist Brahmo ideology. Hence Kshudiram's act of transgression is not presented as an isolated case of an individual, but as symptomatic of a larger ideological paradigm represented by the Brahmo movement which then needs to be vilified and condemned. Quite expectedly, Kshudiram is depicted as a snobbish, vain man whose education has only made him despise his own roots. Once he goes to Calcutta for studies he does not return home even during the holidays

because he found his own lowly home and uneducated mother to be beneath his status in spite of the fact that it was the hard earned money of his fisherwoman mother that sponsored his education after the untimely death of his father. He despises the fishy odour his mother emits, feels ashamed to touch her feet and rejects the matrimonial match his mother proposes on the ground that the girl also belongs to a fishing family. However, Kshudiram learns the insurmountable nature of caste when he tries to arrange his own match with the cousin of his roommate Nibaran who is a *Kayastha*, and is confronted with questions about his own caste which he had successfully hidden till then under the title of babu. Thus Kshudiram's cardinal sin becomes his ambition to transcend his divinely ordained caste position in the orthodox Hindu social hierarchy thereby prioritising the aspiration of the individual over the strictures of doctrinal demands of social conformity and discipline.

In this regard it also needs to be mentioned how the author sets up a binary between Kshudiram's mother and the maid servant in Kshudiram's city home, who both belong to the lower castes, in order to criticise the desire for caste mobility. Kshudiram's mother Padma, is the obedient *Shudra* who does not wish to change her station in society despite the condescension of her reformist son. She is happy to be a fisherwoman and treats her business as sacred. She is thus depicted with sympathy as the mother whose sacrifice is disregarded by her ungrateful son. In contrast the unnamed maid of Kshudiram's house is the errant *Shudra* who hides her caste in order to get her job. Consequently she is depicted as coquettish, manipulative and cantankerous—all the attributes of undesirable femininity in the traditional patriarchal imagination.

As in *Kalpataru*, here too the vices of the Brahmo characters are contrasted to the virtues of the rustic Brahmin cook of Kshudiram's household who is presented as the model of virtue. As a cook the Brahmin would have been considered as beneath the *bhadralok* class in spite of his high caste status and hence he is consciously chosen as the antithesis to Kshudiram and his ilk in order to uphold an alternate definition of *bhadrata* based on virtue. As an orthodox Brahmin he conducts himself according to all the prescribed rituals of Brahminhood performing frequent ablutions and daily prayers, eating self-cooked food and observing various religious injunctions. As the eldest son of the family he fulfils all his duties including looking after the ancestral property, observing all the religious festivities as well as the daily worship of the family deity and taking care of his family members including his mother, brother, widowed aunt and the farmer who tilled their land. The readers are informed that this farmer though belongs to the lowly *bagdi*

caste is treated like a family member by the Brahmin though his treatment of the lower caste maid servant belies this claim. Though the maid claims to be a *kayastha* he doubts her and does not allow her to touch any food item and even washes the clean utensils after she had washed them to get rid of her defiling touch. From the perspective of the Brahminical ideology of the author the condescending kindness that the Brahmin might have shown by providing for the farmer (albeit in lieu of his labour) is precisely what the “good” *Shudras* deserve and is enough proof of Brahminical magnanimity. Thus, this strict observation of caste hierarchy is what makes him a good Brahmin within the ideological framework of the novel.

Again, unlike the Brahmos and their preoccupation with lust, the Brahmin is presented as a somewhat asexual character; this regulation of one’s desires and physical pleasures being a mark of true Brahmin’s *sattva* gun. He chooses not to marry in order to curtail expenditure and having married off his younger brother he devotes himself to the service of the family as well as neighbours. It is this loving and helpful nature of the Brahmin that also makes him adopt the little son of a Brahmin neighbour whose wife suddenly dies. His taking up of the cook’s job was also dictated by the need to earn more for the boy’s education. Thus, in contrast to the high blown talks of social reform and the self-serving actions of the Brahmos the Brahmin is shown to actually deliver selfless service to people. Thus, a dichotomy is set up between the Brahmos representing only empty talk and the Brahmin representing selfless action. As the narrator remarks later about the Brahmin’s distaste for reading newspapers, ‘[r]eading does not lead to wisdom; rather it gives rise to vanity. Action on the other hand leads to a diminution of the ego and eventually paves the way to wisdom. Without the guidance of the guru the fruits of reading are doubtful, hence it is better to serve a guru than read by oneself. However, after completing one’s daily chores one can benefit by reading the *Puranas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*’ (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 185).

Nibaran, the western educated roommate of Kshudiram treats these words of the Brahmin with condescension musing that such backward, prejudiced thinking is the bane of the Indian society and the reason for the persistence of colonial rule, but the absurdity of the solution that he imagines—driving the British away with a few sharp, polemical essays in the newspapers— makes him appear laughable. For Indranath the very idea of the *bhadralok* nationalism was a hypocritical project because as a class ideologically affiliated to western culture and drawing their values from it they could not be true nationalists. Commenting on the paradoxical stance of the *bhadralok* nationalists he writes, ‘They consider the imitation of the English as their true calling, yet nowhere else can one find a class more angry with the

English...They are proud for the English and yet cannot tolerate them at all' (Bandyopadhyay 1925, 910). His distaste for such phony and cowardly nationalism found satiric expression in such poems as the mock heroic *Bharat Uddhar Kavya* and *Volunteery Kavya* as well as numerous sketches of the *Panchananda*. Thus, the prejudiced Brahmin of Nibaran's assessment actually comes to embody the author's statement of a cultural nationalism envisaged in an essentially Brahminical mould through the radical alterity that the orthodox Brahmin poses to the modernity of colonial culture. Indranath's nationalist stance is thus essentially what Partha Chatterjee calls a 'backward looking emotionalism; ... an ideological emphasis on what is distinctly national i.e. culturally distinct from the Western and the modern...a characteristic of the revivalist or fundamentalist cultural movements, usually of a religious-communal nature' (Chatterjee 1993, 81). Instead of re-envisioning Hindu social institutions in modern and rational lines to counter the supposed immutability of colonized subjectivity as his contemporary Hindu nationalists like Bankim Chandra attempted, the ultra-orthodox Indranath's nationalism proceeds precisely from a rejection of rationality and progress, and an unquestioning valourisation of the Brahminical systems whose antiquity and immutability become the *raison d'être* of their anti-colonial nature. Brahminical caste structures are thus held as sacrosanct markers of nationalistic self-identity of the Hindus even if it means an evasion or denial of some of its problems as seen in the case of the role of *kulinism* in Bimala's fall in *Kalpataru*.

Thus, to conclude, as an orthodox Hindu nationalist Indranath Bandyopadhyay's opposition to western education and the resultant Brahmo reformism stemmed from what he perceived as a promotion of individualism and moral independence from the rigidity of the time-tested patriarchal Hindu social hierarchy based on caste and gender discrimination. In this reactionary worldview social mobility particularly in terms of caste and gender is an anathema as it leads to a dilution of Brahminical hegemony and hence anarchy. Thus a binary opposition is set up between the evil Brahmo whose rejection of caste and promotion of women's emancipation is presented as a disguised form of libertarianism, and the good Brahmin whose strict adherence to the caste and gender norms dictated by scriptural authority make him an exemplary nationalist figure. Thus, the exploration of the caste dynamics present in the anti-Brahmo satires of Indranath Bandyopadhyay throws ample light on the early waves of the ultra-orthodox Hindu revivalist nationalism which was emerging in Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century.



**Notes:**

1This and all other quotations from Bengali texts have been translated by me.

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**Financial Illiteracy deficits Financial Inclusion: An Emerging Chaos in Financial  
Sectors of India and China**

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**Abstract**

*This paper will address impact of India and China's Financial inclusion policies in accordance to their present legal framework. India's working schemes on digital inclusion are a widespread success. The proliferation of cyber-attacks is symbolic to the deficiency in Financial Literacy within the Indian legal framework. This paper will also assess the correlation between financial literacy and financial inclusion effecting the growing economy of India and China. Lastly the paper will attempt to analyse the financial literacy notions with some suggestive measures.*

**Introduction**

An inclusive financial services system is crucial for the holistic development of an economy. It allows the underprivileged in a country to access financial products, services, and credit facilities, thereby facilitating their social upliftment (Arora 2017, p 52). Access to financial products and services is crucial for individuals to enhance their daily lives. By utilising savings, credit, and insurance, people can work towards achieving their long-term aspirations, such as launching and growing a business, investing in education and health, and building a safety net for unexpected situations. This ultimately leads to an overall improvement in their quality of life. As per the OECD, financial Inclusion is defined as the goal is to facilitate affordable, timely, and sufficient access to regulated financial products and services, as well as expand their use across all segments of society (Zaidi, Hussain, and Uz Zaman 2021, p 2). The financial inclusion strategies in India and China demonstrates a robust approach. The Indian government has implemented various schemes to facilitate digital banking, insurance services, and housing allotments (Singh and Pande 2023, p 7). As a result, people are increasingly embracing these digital platforms to access government facilities and participate in the financial ecosystem. In 2015, the Chinese Financial System officially incorporated the financial inclusion model into its national strategies. In 2016, the Chinese Government officially endorsed a plan to advance

growth of financial inclusion from 2016 to 2020 (Zhu and Zhang 2023, p 12). This approach entailed the active participation of the financial sectors in China, working in tandem with the government, to integrate themselves into the domain of digital finance. In light of existing models, it is quite evident that countries continue to grapple with a multitude of cybercrime incidents, particularly those pertaining to the financial sector. Citizens' inclusion has given them access to the digital financing world. However, the lack of necessary literacy and equipped knowledge appears to be a significant barrier (Rahim, Ali, and Adnan 2022, p 20). Individuals' increasing involvement in financial inclusion without sufficient financial literacy is leading them to a vulnerable state, rendering their community susceptible to such practices.

### **Financial Inclusion: Scope and Extent in India and China**

The banking sector in India has a rich history that encompasses traditional banking practices from the colonial era to the period of reforms, followed by the nationalisation and subsequent privatisation of banks ("India" 2012, p 117). Currently, there is a booming presence of foreign banks in India. In recent years, banking in India has undergone a lengthy journey, experiencing significant growth and development. The adoption of technology has sparked a revolution in operational methods of the banking sector (Irrinki and Burlakanti 2017, p 147). The primary goal of financial inclusion is to eliminate all obstacles that hinder individuals from accessing financial support and to offer financial services without any form of discrimination. The extensive principle behind India's Financial Inclusion is "Sarvodaya through Antodaya" which means "welfare of all through upliftment of the weakest". This principle gives the financial inclusion a direction to work for the inclusion of the deprived communities towards the booming digital economy (Barman 2020, p 359). The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Aadhaar and the Mobile Phones eco system has projected a major shift in the financial inclusion universe. The present scenario depicts the use of mobile devices in order to regulate and manage the bank accounts of individuals including fund transfer, financial transactions and availing various financial schemes (Mittal et al. 2023, p 1710). The Indian financial ecosystem is not the only place where financial inclusion is rapidly expanding; it is a global phenomenon. China, as an economic hub, is also actively involved in this movement. With a similar vein to India, the Chinese government has also implemented various schemes aimed at promoting

financial inclusion. The process of incorporating digital inclusion among the people at large in China was incorporated with a system comprising of multiple stages. During the period from 2004 to 2013, the emergence of third-party payment companies, such as Alipay, played a significant role in driving the widespread adoption of digital payment methods ("The Development of Digital Financial Inclusion in China" 2023, p 88). In the present scenario, the digital payments have become a part of the daily routine. During the second stage, which spanned from 2014 to 2017, Internet finance companies ventured into areas such as micro-finance and consumer finance (Zhu and Zhang 2023, p 157). This expansion of digital, inclusive finance reached a broader range of fields. This stage of development allows for a wider range of individuals to access and benefit from financial services. During the third stage, which began in 2018 and continues to the present, there has been a gradual improvement in regulatory policies, leading to the standardised development of digital inclusive finance. This stage of development enhances the safety, reliability, and convenience of digital financial inclusion.

### **Financial Literacy: A tool to Serve Financial Inclusion in India and China**

The Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that "Financial literacy is a combination of Financial awareness, knowledge, skills, attitude, and behaviour necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve financial well-being" (Atkinson and Messy 2012, p 10). Currently, the market situation is highly intricate for individuals with limited financial literacy. High financial literacy among market participants can contribute to achieving the financial market's goal (Sarma and Pais, 2011, p 613). In a rapidly changing financial environment, access to financial services is becoming more convenient but also poses more hazards to individuals, financial literacy has emerged as a crucial life skill for individuals as well as for micro and small businesses. Financial education can improve financial literacy by augmenting one's understanding, abilities, and mindset around finances (Torma, Barbić, and Ivanov 2023, p 64). The total financial literacy level is influenced by factors such as gender, education, income, nature of employment, and place of work. It has been observed that government employees have a lower degree of financial literacy compared to private employees. The financial literacy level among the young working population in metropolitan India is equivalent to that of similar groups in other nations.

(Dhandayuthapani 2020, p 1176) It should be mentioned that in the Indian context, similar findings have been observed in other studies regarding the impact of socio-demographic variables such as family income and gender on different aspects of financial literacy. India has the potential to become the world's most financially literate country due to the high number of young adults in the country. India's large population of young and growing children presents an opportunity to cultivate a financially literate nation, given the right approach to financial education. Assessing the financial literacy of a young mind involves considering various dimensions, such as their knowledge, attitude, and behaviour towards finance (Dhandayuthapani 2020, p 1176). According to the Reserve Bank of India, financial literacy is considered a crucial component of financial inclusion. However, the country has not been able to achieve the desired outcome of implementing a well-structured financial literacy program (Kumari 2017, p 63). The rising cybercrimes such as phishing, spear-phishing, vishing are primary examples of the ongoing trends in the banking system. In the last decade, India witnessed a booming growth in the cybercrime sector and majorly concentrating to the banking and financial sector. The reason behind this concentration is the financial inclusion of a sector of people without the required level of financial literacy. In an equation it can be explained as:

$$\text{Financial Inclusion} - \text{Financial Literacy} = \text{Financial Vulnerability}$$

Thus, the depravity of the individuals from financial literacy is making the consumer base vulnerable and more accessible to the perpetrators waiting for an opportunity to strike the ailing nerve of the consumers shifting their roles from consumers to victims. The implementation of the financial literacy principle is not a sole task of the banking sector rather the government, along with the schemes involving the financial inclusion should also invest their time into managing and launching schemes promoting financial literacy (Nedungadi et al. 2018, p 518). The successful financial inclusion models present in India are landmark examples of successful state funded schemes (Nautiyal and Ismail 2022, p 284).

### **Financial Inclusion's nexus with Digital Inclusion**

The advancement of digital inclusive finance has the potential to enhance the capacity of financial services and rejuvenate rural areas, facilitate the integration of small and medium-sized enterprises into the global value chain, diminish the disparity between the affluent and the underprivileged, and ultimately attain the objective of shared prosperity (Saini 2024, p 2049).

Digital financial inclusion involves leveraging emerging technologies like the Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence to offer the general public with financial services that are more convenient, efficient, and cost-effective. Over the past few years, digital financial inclusion has gained global recognition for its remarkable progress yet, Information asymmetry, difficulty in risk control, and imperfect regulatory policies continue to pose significant challenges to the advancement of digital financial inclusion. (Zhu and Zhang 2023, p 18)

Based on Peking University's digital report considering macro development, China's digital financial inclusion business has experienced significant growth from 2011 to 2018, with the median value of the digital financial inclusion index showing a remarkable leapfrog development. The province experienced a significant increase from 33.6 in 2011 to 214.6 in 2015, and further rose to 294.3 in 2018. This represents an impressive 8.9-fold increase over the span of eight years, with an average annual growth rate of 36.4 per cent (Deng et al. 2021, p 12).

### **Financial Literacy: RBI Perspective**

The First Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked a booming shift towards finances as the Foreign Direct Investments started taking over the markets opening portals for the international banking sector to enter the Indian Market (Mishra and Naik 2020, p 17). In 2013, the RBI implemented a 5-year strategy to boost the financial inclusion in India along with Financial Education (RBI 2013, p 9). The concept of financial education in 2013-18 was surrounded with certain key concepts such as: Learning about bank accounts, insurance, retirement savings programs, and securities market investments like stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Understanding compound interest, present and future value of money, annuity, investment return, risk, protection, and diversification. It is crucial to cultivate the necessary skills and confidence to identify and take

advantage of financial opportunities. Throughout several life stages, including schooling, work, home ownership, midlife, retirement, and living in retirement, individuals must make prudent financial choices concerning savings, expenditures, insurance, investments, and debt administration (Reserve Bank of India 2020, P 8). The NSFI model aimed to implement and promote financial inclusion across the country through various schemes (IRDA 2020, p6). The main objective of the curriculum was to promote financial literacy at the school level, enabling individuals to improve their decision-making skills at an early age. The social marketing techniques used mediums such as Newspapers, Radio Television, Books, Magazines, Cartoon Formats etc in order to penetrate the curio city individuals with regard to the financial literacy. (Cavoli, Onur, and Sourdin 2021, p 256). The rising number of bank frauds, cyber-attacks and phishing instances within the nationalised and the private banks clamoured the failure of this plan seeking a better stand over the same issue (Singh 2023, p 583).

After the unanticipated demonetisation, the push to transform India into a cashless economy boomed since people had money in accounts but the demonetization left them with limited resources resulting the increased cashless transactions. The habit of cashless transactions gradually incorporated within the system of cash-flow as a result of which many deprived individuals went Digital (Thermadam 2020, p 42). This transition benefited the mass but simultaneously pushed them towards the danger of risking their hard-earned money to cyber vulnerability. Without a solid grasp of digital and financial concepts, low-income individuals struggled to fully comprehend the advantages of USSD-based mobile banking and effectively utilise its features (Dahiya 2023, p 6399). To further progress towards a cashless society, it is important to adopt a more measured approach and carefully consider implementing a strong encryption system (Irrinki and Burlakanti 2017, p 156). To achieve the strategic objectives, NSFE 2020-25 suggests using a '5 C' approach to spread financial education (KUMAR and SAINI 2020, p 31). This involves focusing on creating relevant content, such as curriculum for schools, colleges, and training establishments (Reserve Bank of India 2020, P 6). Through this method, financial education also contributes to the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4 on Education (Mora et al. 2020, P 2). Financial education, in particular, aligns with SDG Target 4.6 on literacy and SDG Target 4.4 on life skills, both of which fall under SDG 4 on education.

### **Co-relation of Financial inclusion and financial literacy: An Indo - China Perspective**

Financial literacy and financial inclusion are closely linked concepts, representing complementary aspects of the same issue. To accurately assess the value of a coin, it is essential to ensure that both sides are in proportion. In order to establish a seamless economic environment, it is necessary for both financial inclusion and literacy to operate in sync. India and China have both embarked on digital economic initiatives around the same time. However, the Chinese digital economy currently holds a stronger position in addressing cybercrime issues. The state directed its financial inclusion focus towards the rural population, resulting in a significant improvement in people's digital access. At the same time, China implemented a financial literacy program to address the needs of its financially disadvantaged citizens in the digital realm. One fascinating aspect of the transition was the discovery of the marginalized population in China. The Peoples Bank of China administration department ordered a comprehensive consumer financial literacy survey in 2017-18 (Huang 2018, p 164). The survey encompassed all 31 provinces and included 3297 towns using probability proportional to size sampling for a 10 per cent coverage ratio. A large sample of 140,000 individuals and 31 administrative units were surveyed electronically ("PBC Releases 2021 Financial Literacy Survey" 2021). The released report comprehensively studies consumer knowledge, behaviour, talent and attitudes. The report revealed that the financial literacy was found to be lower among adolescents and older individuals. It was also seen that the illusory investment returns also served as a major reason to financial vulnerability among the individuals (Nan 2021, p 307). The PBC released Financial Literacy Survey 2021 found that the public security authorities settled almost 256,000 complaints and additionally 140 million bogus calls and 870 million fake E-mails were stopped. These measures saved a 120 billion Yuan economic loss. China's digital economy has expanded making the financial services more accessible to its citizen. When a financial inclusion product enters the market, it is essential for individuals to have a fundamental understanding of it. Without this knowledge, there is a risk that unscrupulous individuals may exploit their vulnerability and lack of information. Financial inclusion is a widely practiced concept in India today. Financial Knowledge and operational capacity must accompany the inclusion of a financial medium; otherwise, it compromises its functionality. India's current legal model focuses on punishing offenders but struggles to identify the root cause of the crime (Leukfeldt, Lavorgna, and Kleemans 2016, p 292). On the other hand, the Chinese model places emphasis on identifying the crime's origin. The fines serve as a deterrent, but there are challenges with



the law's implementation due to jurisdictional issues. In contrast, the Chinese model provides clear guidelines on jurisdiction, stating that any crime involving a person residing in the country falls under the Chinese legal framework (Bainbridge 2007, p 279). The financial inclusion model in India provides easy access to technology, but it falls short in terms of the necessary training and expertise to address illegal activities related to this access (Abdelhamid, Ayesha, and Thabtah 2014, p 5951). On the other hand, the Chinese model combines inclusion with accountability by holding the specific organization responsible for implementing the inclusion model. India emphasizes the analysis of past incidents to better understand and address attacks, while the Chinese approach prioritizes preventing future attacks from their source (Mohammad, Thabtah, and McCluskey 2015, p 6).

## **Conclusion**

India and China are commercial hubs of the entire world and another aspect which brings the countries to a similar page is the Population. The population of India and China is a huge factor in the Financial Ecosystem of both the countries (Zhu and Xiao 2020, p 57). The Financial inclusion initiatives in order to financially indulge the entire population started at a similar timeline around 2012-13 when the true necessity of digital financial inclusion came into the picture. Financial inclusion simply referred to the inclusion of the population in the regular financial transactions, especially the marginalised sector and the lower income group which hesitated to participate in the banking sector. The Chinese Government at banking level had recently conducted a comprehensive survey on the literacy level of the Chinese population and the implementation of the financial inclusion policies through the eyes of Financial Literacy. The comprehensive study revealed that the majority Chinese population are aware of the financial schemes available and how their financial choices effect their eligibility to acquire a loan from the bank. The major issue with financial literacy in China was the appropriation of funds and the irrational expectation returns from an invested amount manifesting the rooting cause for their vulnerability towards cybercrimes. The Indian financial literacy system had a different approach due to the lack of precise financial data in regard to the financial literacy of the people. The precision which the Chinese survey brought out was the lacking element in the Indian Financial literacy model. The conduction of a similar survey in order to attain the data of the people at large would be a beneficial step towards directing the financial literacy program at a precise direction for more productive output. The Indian consumers are habituated to the financial inclusion to such extent that the digital payment portals have become an integral part

of their daily life, meanwhile the financial literacy rate of the consumers are persistently low and therefore the Reserve Bank of India after conducting a National Level strategy for five years starting from 2013-18, had to initiate financial literacy strategy 2019-2024. The inconsistency in the system and the lack of implementation of the framed guidelines are making the financial literacy rate considerably low in a growing digital market such as India. The growing financial inclusion without the collaboration of an equally strong financial literacy guideline will automatically transition the consumer base in to a financially vulnerable breed of consumers. The Indian Economic status demands its citizens to be financially powerful but the real-life scenario depicts a different story altogether. The differential factor which makes a persistent gap between the two countries even after introducing the concept of financial inclusion at a similar timeframe is the precision by which the Chinese government is utilising the research and development in order to determine the point of lag for the smooth incorporation of financial inclusion. India needs to adopt the methodology and precisely locate the point where the inclusion model needs to work.

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## Trend and Composition of Services Trade: Comparing the Position of India and Maldives in Global Market

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### Abstract

*This article has described the comparative position of India and Maldives in the global trade in services. In general, this article has examined the various dynamics of trade in services of India and Maldives. To study the trend and composition, Annual Growth Rate and Compound Growth Rate are used. For this study, the secondary data has been collected from the WTO trade in services database (ITC Trade Map, 2022) based on the IMF database from 2002 to 2021. The result indicates that Maldives and India have comparative advantages in different service industries, given this complementarity, both countries has the potential to enhance the gains from trade in services.*

**Keywords:** Services Sector, Services Trade, Balassa Index, India, Maldives.

### Introduction

There is a long history of strong cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnic, and commercial relations between India and the Maldives. This is a centuries-old connection marked by intimacy and respect for one another. India was instrumental in the early establishment of diplomatic ties and the 1965 recognition of the Maldives as an independent nation. The Maldives have strategic importance for India due to its close proximity to the Indian Ocean and its west coast and key maritime routes. India is a leading country in the Maldives in multiple domains, and it is well known that it plays a vital role there. The importance of India's role in maintaining peace and stability in the region is highlighted by the Maldivian government's 'India First' policy. Crucially, there haven't been any big political disagreements in the Maldives-Indian relationship. By using bilateral agreements to amicably settle historical disputes, like the Maldives' claim to Minicoy Island, collaboration and confidence were increased.

India is the powerful giant with a long-lasting influence on South Asian geopolitics, weaving a complex web of interwoven politics. On the other hand, despite being a little dot on the map, the Maldives has made a name for itself. The Maldives has skilfully managed its foreign relations since attaining independence, especially with its enormous neighbour, India, cultivating a partnership that has experienced notable expansion and mutual benefits. This relationship has been a central theme in the history of the twenty-first

century, illustrating the dynamic interaction between two opposing powers. But uncertainty has been introduced by China's growing supremacy and India's shifting interests, making the delicate balance difficult to maintain. This delicate ballet of diplomacy touches on issues that go well beyond just bilateral relations.

It is clear from delving into the geopolitical continuum of relations between India and the Maldives that this alliance is dynamic and constantly changing, moulded by both geopolitical currents and strategic imperatives. Every aspect of this relationship—from economic integration to security collaboration to the rich tapestry of cross-cultural interactions—tells a tale of reciprocal reliance and common goals. However, as the tides of world politics rise and fall, India is faced with the task of preserving its strategic hegemony in the area against the growing influence of its aspirational neighbour, China. With India's security interests at stake, the delicate balance that once characterized relations between India and the Maldives is currently put to the test of resilience. In this article, an attempt is made to compare the various dynamics of services trade position of both of these nations.

### **Data and Methodology**

For comparing the services trade position of both the countries, India and Maldives, the data for the year 2005 to 2021 have been obtained from the sources like the ITC Trade Map (ITC, UNCTAD), WTO trade in services database, OECD Trade in Services database. The classification of Trade Map data is based on the IMF sixth edition of the Balance of Payments Manual (BMP-6) methodology, where the services are classified into 12 categories. For the analysis trend and composition, annual growth rates, compound annual growth rates are calculated.

The RCA is calculated using the method suggested by Balassa in 1965 (Balassa, 1965, p. 99-123). The comparative advantage is revealed by the relative export performance of the individual product category (Balassa, 1965, p. 99-123). In our study to compute the RCA of countries for different service categories, we have used the same method as:

$$RCA_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij}}{x_{wj}} / \frac{X_i}{X_w}$$

Where,  $RCA_{ij}$  = Revealed comparative advantage of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  country's  $j^{\text{th}}$  service;  $x_{ij}$  = Exports of the  $j^{\text{th}}$  service by the  $i^{\text{th}}$  country;  $X_i$  = Total service exports of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  country;  $x_{wj}$  = World exports of the  $j^{\text{th}}$  service;  $X_w$  = Total world exports of services



Revealed Comparative Advantage captures the degree of specialisation of the export sector. A value of  $RCA > 1$  indicates that the country has a comparative advantage in export of that particular product / sector / industry. A value of  $RCA = 1$  indicates that the country has no different degree of specialisation than the world.

Further, the intra-industry trade indices are calculated using the Grubel Lloyd method (Grubel & Lloyd, 1971 and Grubel & Lloyd, 1975). The index can be calculated as follows:

$$GL_{it} = 1 - \frac{|X_{it} - M_{it}|}{(X_{it} + M_{it})}, \quad GL_{it} \in [0,1]$$

The value of the GL index lies between 0 and 1 where 0 indicates perfect inter-industry trade and 1 indicates complete intra-industry trade (IIT).

## Results and Discussions

### Position of the Countries in Global Trade

The analysis of *share of India and Maldives in the world services trade* over a period of two decades, from 2002 to 2021 indicates that India's share in world services trade, both in terms of exports and imports, witnessed steady growth throughout the years. In 2002, India accounted for approximately 1.19 per cent and 1.30 per cent of the world's service exports and imports, respectively. Over the following years, India's presence in global services trade expanded significantly. By 2021, India's share in world service exports increased to 3.99 per cent, while its share in service imports rose to 3.53 per cent. This consistent upward trend reflects India's increasing integration into the global services market and its emergence as a significant player in the sector. In simple words, the data highlights India's notable growth in the global services trade arena over the years. India's share in both service exports and imports consistently increased, reflecting the nation's expanding service sector and its ability to offer competitive services to the global market.

On the other hand, Maldives, being a smaller economy compared to India, had a relatively minor share in world services trade throughout the period. In 2002, Maldives accounted for a negligible portion of the global services trade, with its share in exports and imports being only 0.02 per cent and 0.01 per cent, respectively. However, Maldives' share in world services trade gradually increased over the years, albeit at a slower pace compared to India. By 2021, Maldives' share in world service exports reached 0.06 per cent, while its share in service imports remained at 0.02 per cent. Although Maldives' presence in the global services trade is comparatively modest, the consistent growth in its share indicates its attempt to capitalize on its advantages in industries like tourism and hospitality. In other words, despite its smaller size and

economy, Maldives demonstrated incremental progress in its share of world services trade. The country's focus on sectors like tourism, marine services, and telecommunications contributed to its gradual increase in global services trade participation. However, the share of Maldives in global services trade remains relatively modest compared to India, reflecting the challenges faced by smaller economies in competing on a global scale.

### **Trend of Services Trade of the Countries**

During the period 2002 to 2021, Both India and the Maldives encountered variations in their trade of services between the years 2002 and 2021. With a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 14.15 per cent, India's exports increased steadily, indicating that its service sector expanded substantially during the period. Further, Maldives demonstrated a steady increase in exports at a CAGR of 12.94 per cent, which was marginally lower than that of India.

When considering imports, both India and the Maldives experienced an expansion. Imports of India increased at a CAGR of 12.46 per cent, while Maldives' imports grew at a slightly higher rate of 12.87 per cent. Moreover, Maldives saw remarkable growth of around 186 per cent in export in 2007, indicating a period of rapid expansion in its service sector. Similarly, India witnessed a notable export growth of around 140 per cent in 2021, signalling a strong recovery after the pandemic.

An investigation of particular years reveals interesting patterns. As an example, India witnessed a substantial surge in its export growth in 2004, which escalated by an astounding 60.16 per cent. This surge is a result of factors like heightened demand and advantageous trade policies.

However, Maldives faced a considerable decline (36.37 per cent) in export in 2005. The period of pandemic show that during 2020, Maldives faced a huge fall (54.78 per cent) in the export as against India, which only faced a fall of 5.41 per cent. The trade of services that requires physical proximity fell due to the Covid-19 pandemic however, during the same period, the increase in the trade of digital services supported the total services trade of India in a great way. Richard Baldwin termed this as Globalisation 4.0 and stated that this is the form of globalisation which changes the manner how services are transacted (Baldwin, 2020). Rapid growth of digital services trade during the Covid-19 pandemic has backed India in maintaining her position in the world services export. The major importer of Indian IT and BPO services are UK and US, pandemic hit these countries hard and thus faced a negative growth rate during the same period which leads to a fall in the demand for India's IT and BPO services which, in turn, reduced the rate of growth of these

services export (Nataraj, 2020; p. 115-118). Similarly, for Import also, the fall in the import value is larger for Maldives during 2020 than that of the India.

### **Analysis of Composition of Services Trade of India and Maldives**

It is well known to all that India is well advanced in the IT field and so is reflected in the services export data of India. It is found that the 'Telecommunications, computer, and information services' is contributing a major share in the total services export of India. Its share remained more than 30 per cent for most of the years. 'Other business services' is a major contributor to the services export of India. 'Insurance and pension services', 'financial services' and 'construction services' are having a very tiny share in the total services export of India. The 'transport' as well as the 'travel services' have a share of 12 per cent and 4 per cent respectively during the period 2021. The combined share of these two sectors has declined from 27 per cent in 2005 to 16 per cent in 2021. Further, in case of import, between 2005 and 2021, India saw significant changes in the makeup of its services imports. Transport services were crucial in demonstrating how dependent the country is on imported transport infrastructure. An increase in inbound tourism or related activities was suggested by the growth in travel services. In India, the incredible growth of computer, information, and telecom services demonstrated India's rapidly developing technological environment. Even with these developments, the lack of information for some service categories highlights the necessity for better reporting systems.

The data of Maldives reveals that the major portion of the services export earning comes from 'Travel' services; more than 90 per cent of the share is made by the travel services followed by the 'Transport services' (having a share around 5 per cent for all years). It is only after 2008, the share of 'Telecommunication, Computer and Information services' has got some share in the total services export. This picture shows that a major source of services export earnings for the Maldives is from the tourism industry (which comes under the travel services). In the case of import, the percentage share of each type of service in Maldives' overall services imports over the years 2006 and 2020 is displayed in the table. The services are divided into twelve codes, each of which stands for a distinct category of service, such as manufacturing, transportation, or travel services. The data reveals notable variations in the Maldives' share of services imports over the two years. Significantly, between 2006 and 2020, the share of services such as manufacturing, travel, telecommunication, computer, and information services increased, suggesting a change in economic priorities or patterns of consumption. However, over the same period, the share of some services, such as personal cultural and recreational services and N.I.E. maintenance and repair services, shows a decline or stays unchanged.

To have a better understanding, the revealed comparative advantage is studied (Table 1). The Absolute Cost Advantage theory was first proposed by Adam Smith in 1776 (Smith, 1776), and it emphasises a nation's specialisation in goods and services in which it excels. This was further developed by David Ricardo's Comparative Cost Advantage theory (Ricardo, 1817), which emphasized specialisation based on relative cost advantages. But it had trouble explaining why relative costs varied so much between countries. This was expanded upon by the Heckscher-Ohlin Theorem (Ohlin, 1933; Heckscher, 1949) which provided a more thorough explanation by connecting comparative advantage to variations in factor endowments and prices. However, this is argued that prices for commodities are also influenced by other elements such as skill levels, laws, and technology. Bela Balassa (Balassa, 1965, p. 99-123) responded by putting forth the Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) framework in the 1960s, which postulates that a nation's current trade pattern reflects its comparative advantage.

**Table 1. Services-wise Revealed Comparative Advantage in Export (Year 2020)**

| Countries        | BMP-6 Classification Code  |    |    |
|------------------|--|----|----|
|                  | 4  | 9  | 10 |
| India            | NA   | ✓  | ✓  |
| Maldives         | ✓  | NA | NA |
| List of Services | 4. Travel Services.<br>9. Telecommunications, computer, and information services.<br>10. Other Business Services.<br>NA No Revealed Comparative Advantage. |    |    |
| Note             | RCA is calculated employing the Balassa Index (Balassa, 1965, p. 99-123).  |    |    |

*Source:* RCA is calculated from the data compiled from the ITC Trade Map Database.

This analysis helps in understanding the competitive edge of each country in particular service category. It is seen that, during 2020, India demonstrates a comparative advantage in 'Telecommunications, computer, and information Services' and 'Other Business Services'. On the other hand, Maldives shows a comparative advantage in category 'Travel services'.

### **Analysis Intra-industry Trade in Services of India and Maldives**

The evolution of intra-industry trade theories began with Ohlin and Hilgerdt in the 1930s (Hilgerdt, 1935; Ohlin, 1933), but it was largely overshadowed until post-war efforts focused on refining the Heckscher-

Ohlin-Samuelson (H-O-S) model. The Chamberlin-Heckscher-Ohlin-Samuelson (C-H-O-S) model emerged, highlighting product differentiation within industries and the resultant intra-industry trade. Early 1960s studies on the European Economic Community's impact revealed a shift towards intra-industry specialization, contrary to earlier predictions of inter-industry specialization. Grubel and Lloyd's work in 1975 provided empirical evidence of intra-industry trade, prompting a surge of research in the late 1970s. Empirical studies on intra-industry trade fall into documentary and explanatory categories, with the latter employing econometric techniques to explain variations across nations or industries. Recent literature delves deeper into factors influencing intra-industry trade, including product differentiation and market concentration. Overall, intra-industry trade has gained prominence as a significant aspect of international economics, facilitating access to a broader range of goods but presenting challenges for certain labour sectors and domestic businesses due to increased competition from abroad.

The data on intra-industry trade (IIT) at the sectoral level for India between 2005 and 2021 indicates that India had notable intra-industry trade in 2005 in the following areas: manufacturing services (0.75), travel (0.81), insurance and pension services (0.74), and fees for intellectual property use (0.77). In 2021, the sectoral dynamics of intra-industry trade have changed. The biggest shift in trade patterns is seen in the huge growth in intra-industry trading in personal, cultural, and recreational services (1.00). In addition, the importance of financial services (0.78) and maintenance and repair services (0.48) has increased, indicating a diverse portfolio of services supporting India's foreign trade.

An aggregate indicator of India's participation in global trade across industries is the average intra-industry trade for the given years. The average IIT was 0.64 in 2005, indicating a moderate degree of specialisation. The average IIT dropped to 0.63 in 2021, indicating a more balanced yet significant intra-industry trading.

On the other hand, the Maldives' sectoral level intra-industry trade (IIT) data for the years 2005 and 2021 provides information about the nation's changing trade trends and sectoral advantages. The Maldives showed significant intra-industry trade in construction (0.63), travel (0.32), and computer, information, and telecommunications services (0.61).

In the year 2021, the IIT dynamics of the Maldives have undergone a dramatic shift. Services related to manufacturing (0.92) are now a significant contributor, indicating that the Maldivian economy is becoming more diversified. The country's ability to adjust to changes in international trade is demonstrated by the sustained significance of travel (0.19) and the introduction of fees for the use of intellectual property (0.54) and other business services (0.45).

A combined indicator of the Maldives' participation in global trade across industries is the average intra-industry trade for the years in question. The average IIT was 0.23 in 2005, indicating a moderate degree of specialisation. The average IIT rose to 0.30 in 2021, indicating a more diversified trade portfolio and a greater level of intra-industry trading.

This analysis demonstrates how the Maldives has successfully used its advantages in nature and services to engage in international trade. The growing significance of services manufacturing highlights the nation's endeavours to expand its economic foundation and bolster its competitiveness within the international arena.

## Conclusion

Over two decades, India's presence in global services trade consistently rose, reflecting its growing significance in the sector. Meanwhile, Maldives, a smaller economy, also showed incremental progress in global services trade, albeit at a slower pace than India. While India's growth was notable, Maldives' focus on industries like tourism and telecommunications facilitated its gradual increase in global trade participation. However, the challenges faced by smaller economies in competing on a global scale were evident, as Maldives' share remained modest compared to India. Despite this, both countries demonstrated efforts to leverage their respective advantages in different sectors to enhance their positions in the global services market.

Between 2002 and 2021, India and the Maldives experienced fluctuations in their services trade. India's exports demonstrated steady growth, reflecting substantial expansion in its service sector, while Maldives showed a slightly lower but still consistent increase in exports. Both countries also saw expansion in imports during this period. Notable spikes in export growth for India in 2004 and for Maldives in 2007 indicate periods of rapid expansion. However, Maldives faced a significant decline in exports in 2005. During the pandemic in 2020, Maldives experienced a substantial drop in both exports and imports compared to India, which saw relatively smaller declines. These trends suggest the differing impacts of external factors and policy dynamics on the services trade of India and the Maldives over the analyzed period.

India's services export data highlights the dominance of 'Telecommunications, computer, and information services' and 'other business services', while sectors like 'Insurance and pension services' and 'financial services' contribute minimally. The combined share of 'transport' and 'travel services' has decreased from 27 per cent in 2005 to 16 per cent in 2021. Notably, the growth in 'Telecommunications, computer, and information services' underscores India's technological advancements. In contrast, Maldives heavily relies

on ‘Travel services’, constituting over 90 per cent of its services export earnings, indicative of its tourism industry's significance. ‘Telecommunication, Computer, and Information services’ gained prominence after 2008. Maldives’ services import data reveals fluctuations over time, with notable increases in sectors like manufacturing, travel, telecommunication, and computer services. However, some sectors, such as personal cultural and recreational services, witnessed declines or remained unchanged, suggesting shifting economic priorities or consumption patterns.

In the case of India, comparative advantage in ‘Telecommunications, computer, and information Services’ and ‘Other Business Services’ can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, India has established itself as a global hub for IT and software services, leveraging its skilled workforce and technological infrastructure. This allows Indian companies to offer competitive telecommunications, computer, and information services to international markets. Moreover, India’s burgeoning business process outsourcing (BPO) industry contributes significantly to its comparative advantage in other business services, including consulting, legal, and accounting services.

On the other hand, Maldives’ comparative advantage in ‘Travel services’ is derived from its natural resources and geographic location. The Maldives is renowned worldwide for its landscapes, beaches, and luxury resorts, making it a highly desirable tourist destination. The country’s tourism sector benefits from these features, attracting millions of visitors annually and generating substantial revenue from travel-related services such as accommodation, dining, and recreational activities. This inherent appeal of Maldives as a tourist destination gives it a comparative advantage in the travel services.

The analysis examines the intra-industry trade (IIT) dynamics of India and the Maldives between 2005 and 2021, highlighting shifts in trade patterns and sectoral advantages. In 2005, India exhibited noteworthy IIT in manufacturing services, travel, insurance and pension services, and fees for intellectual property use, underscoring its proficiency in industries blending manufacturing and services. By 2021, there was significant growth in IIT in personal, cultural, and recreational services, alongside increased importance in financial services and maintenance and repair services. Despite a slight decrease in the average IIT from 0.64 to 0.63, India sustained a robust presence in the global services sector, adapting to evolving trade conditions and showcasing a diverse and expanding service industry. Conversely, in 2005, the Maldives demonstrated substantial IIT in construction, travel, and computer, information, and telecommunications services, emphasizing the significance of tourism-related services and information technology. By 2021, there was a notable shift towards services related to manufacturing, indicating a more diversified economy. Travel remained significant, while fees for intellectual property use and other business services emerged as

new contributors. The average IIT increased from 0.23 to 0.30, reflecting a more diversified trade portfolio and heightened intra-industry trading, illustrating the Maldives' successful utilization of its natural and service-related advantages to engage in international trade. Overall, both India and the Maldives have adeptly adjusted to changing trade dynamics, with India maintaining dominance in the services sector and the Maldives demonstrating successful economic diversification.

In conclusion, India and Maldives possess comparative advantages in distinct sectors of the services industry. This complementarity in comparative advantages presents significant opportunities for both nations to enhance their gains through services trade. India and the Maldives can develop profitable alliances and collaborations in the trade of services by utilizing one another's advantages and strengths. For example, India, with its expertise in IT and business services, can support Maldives in developing and optimizing its technological infrastructure and digital capabilities to improve efficiency and customer experience in the tourism sector. On the other hand, Maldives can provide India with unique opportunities in the travel and tourism industry, facilitating market access and expansion for Indian businesses in this profitable sector.

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## Stigmatic Skin: Women Tattoo and Violence in Indian Society in the Movie ‘Game Over’

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### Abstract

*Given that India is globally acclaimed for its traditional values and cultural adherence, the practices of body modification such as tattooing, piercing etc. still struggle to obtain a widespread acceptance in Indian society. The movie ‘Game Over’ (2019), deals with the socio-cultural stigma attached to tattoos on women’s skin and the impact it serves to their lives in contemporary age. Through a close analysis of the movie, this paper aims to investigate the stigma on women’s skin across three levels— personal, familial, and societal in order to examine individual experiences of tattooed women, parental attitudes, and societal reactions within the patriarchal frameworks of Indian society. The present study offers a comprehensive exploration of how tattoo on women skin can evoke the patriarchal outrage, invite sexual violence and assassination, perpetuate prejudice of rape fantasy and elicit gendered stigma by Indian parents.*

**Keywords:** Tattoo, stigma, gender dynamics, patriarchy, Indian society

### Introduction

Given that India is still globally acclaimed for its traditional values and cultural adherence, the practices of body modification such as tattooing, piercing etc. struggle to obtain a uniformed acceptance in Indian society. Despite the nuanced and deeply rooted subcultural history, which includes spiritual, religious, even medicinal significance, tattoo continues to haul the legacy of stigma and prejudices corresponding to its longstanding reputation of divergence and rebellion. Lee Barron (2020) notes that ‘while tattooing has manifestly expanded beyond the niche of —cultures, the theme of tattoos representing otherness, rebellion and divergence persists, especially within popular culture’ (3). Movies, one of the quintessential apparatuses of popular culture, serve both as a mirror and lens through which society’s values, beliefs, and aspirations are reflected and refracted. By providing insights into personal experiences and collective ideologies, movies offer a platform to explore complex social issues while also challenging the dominant narratives. While the portrayal of men’s tattoos is often celebrated in movies, tattooed

women, however, is comparatively limited and are dispatched with negative disposition in movies. The stigma associated with tattooed women in Indian society is a recurring theme in contemporary Indian movies. One such example is the 2019 released Telugu movie (also dubbed in Hindi) 'Game Over', where the plot of the movie addresses the socio-cultural stigma attached to tattoos on women's skin and the impact it serves to their lives in contemporary Indian society. The movie not only showcases a tragic individual narrative of two women's experience with tattoos but also delves into a broader and more complex trajectory of social conflicts intersecting personal choice, autonomy and familial dynamics of these women. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the stigma surrounding tattoos across three levels—personal, familial, and societal and examines individual experiences, parental attitudes, and societal reactions within the patriarchal frameworks of Indian Society.

### **Theoretical Underpinning and Context of the Movie**

Michel Foucault's rich theoretical account of the body and imposition of power puts an emphasis on disciplinary exercise and the regulation of the hierarchal power that is intricately embedded into the socio-cultural norms. The power-exercise exerted by the hierarchal authority in society produces a cycle of dominance and submission that eventually results into the perpetuation of inequality and the restriction of individual agency. Although Foucault's theory does not promote any sort of gender-specific angles, it serves as a foundation for feminist theories of the body and society. Susan Bordo and Judith Butler, two most celebrated theorists, have expanded upon Foucault's idea of body, power and society, viewing women's bodies as socio-political arenas where male surveillance and control is exerted to limit their individual agencies. Bordo's notion of female body emphasises on the conventional norms set by the patriarchy that dictates how women's bodies should look, behave and perform. Butler also points out, while recalling Beauvoir that, 'body suffers a certain cultural construction not only through convention that sanction and prescribe how one acts one's body' (Butler 1988, 524). In this paper, the authors argues that they not only control the female bodies and their agencies by prescribing limited autonomy but also condemn with punitive measures when women violate these norms. The present movie narrates the story of two women who not only contend with the constant burden of social prejudices and stigmas but also receive brutal punitive repercussions such as sexual assault and victimisation upon getting their skin imprinted with

tattoos. This illustrates that the ultimate control over the female bodies still retains with the hegemonic patriarchy.

Even though Indian society is a unique fusion of traditional and modern values, Indian parents, especially those belonging to the conservative and traditional families, often associate tattoos with a rejection of traditional and mainstream values of society. Ingrained in profound religious beliefs, the act of tattooing, seen as desecrating the sanctity of the female body by puncturing the skin with ink, is widely acknowledged as a disregard for the social and moral values. Upon finding out about their children getting tattooed, they discover themselves deeply stifled with the feeling of failing their children as parents and end up unable to provide adequate support and protection from any encounter of social humiliation. DeMello (2000) assesses that tattoo as a body modification act is 'inescapably gendered'. When tattooed onto women's skin, tattoos can exacerbate the derogatory perception that reinforces patriarchal ideals, causing dismay as female bodies are often expected to adhere to notions of docility and chastity. Moreover, there exists a societal pressure for women to maintain clear, unmarked skin, which perpetuates the values of 'neatness, diligence, compliance, femininity, and passivity' (DeMello 2000, 173). The present movie finely captures the role of gender in the context of tattooing among Indian women. Moreover, it reveals that the perpetuation of the tattoo stigma is not only solely enforced by the patriarchal authority in society but also endorsed by the middle-class Indian women, stressing a gendered dimension in the movie. Women are discouraged to have tattoos especially by the mothers; and upon getting sexually abused due to the imprinted body, their suffering is compounded with the lack of parental support. Not only do women who get tattoos face stigma and a diminished societal value, but their parents and family also become permanently entrenched in the stigmatic narrative by the society. Hence, the movie closely analyses Indian parents participating in gendered tattoo stigma and victim blaming their children, while also stimulating the stigma associated with their social consciousness and moral judgment.

Apart from that, the movie 'Game Over' (2019) explores how women with tattoos are stereotyped as sexually promiscuous identities (Swami and Furnham 2007). The socio-cultural history of traditional notions of tattoos often depicts designs on women's skin that include feminine objects, colourful symbols, and imaginative pictures, which can be perceived as both seductive and desirable, potentially attracting male sexual desire. In this movie, we see how

tattoos are interpreted as a reflection of women's boldness and repressed sexual desire. As a result, the prejudice arises that women with tattooed skin are seen as deploying a sexual invitation to men. Tattoos being visible on women skin fascinates men going to the extent of formulating prejudice that women with tattoos are sexually not only available but also reflects rape fantasy. The very concept of 'rape fantasy' is associated with an intense desire of men and women experiencing pleasure by coercing or being coerced the other into a forceful sexual activity. As women are generally demonstrated into passive participation of sexual roles, it is therefore, often socially received that women to be the ones with repressed sexual desires which tattoos reflect on the skin. Bivona and Critelli (2009) note that while it is not uncommon or strange for women to desire such fantasy, yet it is because of the negative stereotype that works against women to have presented them as sexually promiscuous. Stemming from the negative stereotype emerges the prejudice that a tattooed woman is sexually promiscuous and a symbol of social disgrace. Therefore, if a tattooed woman experiences sexual assault, blame is often cast upon to the woman with the assumption that she invited such actions due to her choice to get a tattoo. This notion perpetuates the harmful belief that women who have tattoos somehow consent to or deserve sexual violation (Kosut 2015, 35).

As women's skin advocates taking charge or control over their own bodies (Mifflin 2013; Atkinson 2002), it challenges the patriarchal paradigm of femininity which results into i) upsetting and perturbing the conventional male dominated popularity and outraging violence against women with significant tattoos ii) cultivating tattoo stigma even by the parents regardless of gender, including women too, iii) regulating prejudice that tattoo on women skin is an invitation of a sexual pleasure called 'Rape Fantasy'. Therefore, this paper analyses how tattoos on women skin outrages the patriarchal authority, invites sexual violence and assassination, prejudice of rape fantasy and gendered stigma by Indian parents.

### **The Masked Violence, Hegemonic Masculinity and Tattoo Sigma**

The three mysterious men that appear in the movie march off to target tattooed women as their victims for brutal assassinations as a punishment for the violation of the purity of the skin. In the very opening scene of the movie, the masked men trespass into Amrutha's house and

murders her as a punishment for attempting to 'defy and reproduce the conventional standards of femininity' (Kang & Jones 2007, 44). Amrutha had her skin inked with tattoos to reclaim her body after recovering from life threatening disease, cancer. For her, the tattoos were celebratory icons which she considered her 'trophies', as a cathartic expression of her defeat over cancer three times. She engraved three heart shaped tattoos on her hand, each symbolic to winning her life back. Departing from the prescribed notion of protecting the body's purity, she reverses the stigma of tattoos by fusing ink into her blood to narrate carve her story of purifying the cancer cells from the blood. For her rebellious act of 'rejecting capitalist patriarchal proscriptions that define and regulate the appearance of the female body' (Kosut 2000, 97). Amrutha receives a barbaric death by suffocation, followed by the beheading of her body, and finally the desecration of her lifeless body through the macabre act of immolation.

The fact that these three masked men exclusively aim only for the women adorned with permanent tattoos is substantiated when Swapna also falls victim of their premeditated vicious intention of murder in the same fashion. They have a long knife to cut the throat of the victim, petrol and matches for burning the body, and a video camera for recording the whole act of murder. Swapna had imprinted a video game controller inside a heart shaped tattoo as a symbol of her enduring love for her job of a video game designer. The selection of a career path as a female game designer inherently embodies a rarity and a spirit of rebellion, which is further emphasises by her tattoo serving as a symbolic testament to the courage and audacity inherent in such a choice. As soon as the perpetrators show up to Swapna's door on a fine evening, it becomes evident that their insidious rage brutal violence now seeks to unleash upon Swapna as threat of the redressal of hegemonic patriarchal canon that feeds themselves with heterosexuality, physical strength, dominance, and aggression (Donaldson 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Towards the end of the movie, the three masked men appear to Swapna's house to finish their punitive task and serve justice. Swapna was accompanied by her maid Kamma in the house when they fought against the perpetrators, and finally managed to save themselves, instituting resistance to patriarchal violence by women.

This violent response is linked to the disapproval of tattoos being inked on a female body as an intolerable act of de-essentialising the stigma and taboo from the society. Even though the identity of the masked men remains unrevealed throughout the movie, their violent intention of attacking and murdering young women who have tattoos imprinted on their skin stands quite

apparent after two victims with tattoos. Their masked appearance and hiding their identities are symbolic to the homogenous representation of the hegemonic masculinity centres on the issue of the marking of women's skin. In this movie, the dominant ideology of masculinity believes that they deserve the death of a devil as their punishments. The intensity of the violence, however, depicts extent of the outrage created from the feeling of insecurity that created the asymmetrical power dynamic within a patriarchal society hegemonic masculinity and unconventional expression of femininity through tattooing.

### **The Blame-Game: Gendered Tattoo Stigma, Sexual Violence and Indian Parents**

While attending a New Year's celebration party, Swapna becomes the victim of a harrowing sexual assault right after getting her tattoo. The consequential turn of events unfolds with a massive media attention where the topic of her sexual violation due to her tattoo on skin becomes the subject of public discourse. The broadcast of news regarding Swapna's assault across various news channels and the social media platforms, leads to her parents experiencing of a profound sense of dismay and lamentation. However, their sentiment overrides the pain, and the trauma Swapna was enduring at that moment. Viewed as an irreplaceable disgrace and a permanent stain on the family's reputation and social status, her parents choose to victim-blame Swapna for her sexual assault. Although Swapna's father projects a strong denial in the gendered tattoo stigma by acknowledging that there is no connection whatsoever between the visual presence of the tattoo and the sexual violation of her daughter's body, in stark contrast, however, Swapna's mother condemns Swapna's decision of getting a tattoo and partying late night to be the sole reason for the sexual victimisation that night. She strikes out that the presence of her tattoo on skin worked as the underlying motivation for male desire to be fulfilled with lust. For her father, it is no more than a tragic incident which Swapna could easily avoid if she had not chosen to violate her body with ink. Swapna's mother says, 'No one says anything to guys who have tattoos all over their bodies. But if a girl gets one...if she hadn't gone out to get a tattoo, this wouldn't have happened' (Game Over 40:00). This suggests that Indian mothers, deeply entrenched in patriarchal structures, actively participate in victim-blaming if their daughters are subjected to sexual violence after getting a tattoo. As a punishment, they admonish their daughter for discarding the gender norm and traditional values

while at the same time deviating from the social expectation of femininity, integrity and chastity. Therefore, her parents play a great role to not only inhibit the independent choices of Swapna but also let her consume the blame for the assault, experience the trauma of the assault, and fight the society at the same time without their care and support. Karin Hudson (2009) specifically talks about the idiosyncrasies of parents and friends of the tattooees and how any sort of disapproval from the near and dear ones can vary from being a simple look of disappointment to being total ostracism' (26-7). Swapna's parents could not help but associate themselves with the rigid moral judgementalism that dominates the systematic patriarchal society. It is also accompanied to the notions of social status and respectability, encompassing parental shame and the potential for disgrace of the overall familial reputation within the Indian social setting. The effect of social fear of honour and shame of her family deeply impacts Swapna, precipitating a destabilisation of her psychological well-being, leading to an increasing estrangement from her parents, and a deliberate withdrawal from refrainment from any kind of societal affairs. Therefore, Swapna's experience of sexual abuse, social humiliation, and psychological wreckage is compounded by the absence of support from her mother, leading to the tragic outcome of her attempt of committing suicide.

### **The Stigma of Rape Fantasy, Tattoo and Fake Narrative**

Apart from being sexually abused due to the stigma of tattoo, Swapna is prejudiced as a sexually promiscuous woman, falsely attributed with narratives of 'rape fantasy'. Even though Swapna is the hapless victim of the sexual abuse, the media narrative converts her into the instigator of the rape attempting to fulfil her sexual desires. After the incident, a video montage of Swapna's assault gets viral on many social media platforms with the access of everybody worldwide interpreting the situation as woman fulfilling her sexual desires through a stimulated enactment of rape. It is because of the rampant dissemination of false knowledge that redefines rape, a forceful submission of sexual acts enacting as source of pleasure. As tattoos are visual representation of 'human desire', it is often connected with women with sexual desires deployed on skin (Karin 2006, 6). Alfred Gell (1993) points out the impact of tattoo on the ones who gazes upon the body of a tattooed as 'other'. It is the beholder of the tattoo who reinvents and interprets the desires of the marked individual through their gaze upon the tattoos. On



entering the coffee shop a year after the incident, two men start gazing at Swapna's tattoos on hand which indicates their recognition her from a featured viral video on the internet. They start engaging in a conversation in a whispering voice.

Remember the girl from the video?

Which video?

The New Year video. She even has the tattoo in her hand...

(Game Over 2019, 37:44-37: 52)

To validate their suspicion, they look into their phones only to stumble upon a year-old news article where Swapna is entitled as a woman who fantasises rape as a projection of her sexual fantasy. The title of the news follows as 'Hot submissive girl enacting her afterparty rape fantasy' (Game Over 2019, 38:50). Here, Swapna's markings on skin are construed as an indictment of her sexual solicitation and a yearning for a forceful submission of sexual acts as source of pleasure. When their whispering and constant 'gaze' catch Swapna's attention, she cannot help but thrusts back to the traumatic recollection of the assault. This shows the persistent perpetuation of violence that continues to leave an impact on the victim even after the incident takes place. Bewildered and alarmed Swapna, when stares back to them, her anticipated look is interpreted as an invitation to her seductive fantasy, a sign of 'having fantasised about being forced to have sex' (Johnson et. al 2020, 175). Their conversation includes taunting laughs and sex pun, starting from the 'devouring' and hair being tied tight which embodies another notion where a woman's pain is often assorted with a source of pleasure and pain as an underpinning element while having pleasure. Unlike the clear distinction of pain and pleasure while talking about a woman's pain and pleasure, it is quite complex and more of a diluted situation where for a woman's suffering is often understood as experience of delight or pleasure.

Not only does this speculate a negative impact of media in this contemporary digital age that produces fake narratives but also dishonours a woman's sexual urges. Therefore, as it turns out, the reality of the tragic humiliation of Swapna changes overnight into an enacted story of her sexual fantasy. This incident of alteration of the truth also stands as a poignant exemplification of distortion of an individual's fundamental rights of agency and reputation. Consequently, it also accentuates a distressing confluence of reputation causing moral as well as emotional

harassment, underscoring the status of women that are victimised and violated in Indian society upon getting a tattoo.

### **Conclusion**

In summation, the paper delves into a multilevel analysis of tattoo stigma of women skin and explores individual, familial, and societal dynamics of two female protagonists as represented in the movie 'Game Over'. Tattoo related stigma results into overarching negative perception and manifestation of a social disapproval or discrimination against women who choose to mark their body with tattoos. This paper closely analyses how the stigma of tattoo leads to marginalization, prejudice, and even physical violence. Amrutha's brutal assassination, and Swapna's murder attempt represents ruffles the vindictive patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity and their volition to punish the wrongdoer. As they 'seek to dismantle established ideologies and the structures of gender stratification' through their tattoos, it generates a sense of vicious threat towards tattooed women in society, exacerbating oppression and violence (Atkinson 2002, 233). The present study also unfolds that the orthodoxically paired impulse of tattoo stigma is not limited to the male authority of the society. Surprisingly, it pairs with women's collaboration to problematise the status of women with tattoos in Indian society. The reason behind discouraging printing tattoos on skin, not only by men but also women in society is associated with the deployment of victim-blaming and moral judgementalism within the framework of a systematic patriarchal society. It is also related to the notions of social status and respectability resulting in parental shame and disgrace of the overall familial reputation which ultimately compound their misery. The stereotypical adherence of tattoos pragmatizes many prejudices into reality, one such is the rape fantasy and women tattoos. Women tattoo imbues the prejudiced notion that tattoos are the manifestation of their seductive desire or rape fantasy. This not only obfuscates a woman's own voice of sexuality but also misleads men to understand what a true sign of a woman's sexual desire is.

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## China's Presence in the Indo-Pacific Region: A Strategic Analysis

Khundongbam Bikenath

### Abstract

*China's increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific region has attracted significant attention and scrutiny in global diplomacy. This paper thoroughly evaluates China's involvement in the Indo-Pacific, examining its economic, political, and military aspects. This study provides insights into how China's actions influence regional dynamics and global geopolitics by analysing initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, military modernization efforts, and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. By incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders and theoretical frameworks, this analysis aims to contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of the intricate challenges and opportunities that China presents in the Indo-Pacific.*

**Key words:** Military Modernization, Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty, Security, Strategic Cooperation, Geo-politics, Debt-Trap Diplomacy, Military Base, South China Sea, and Belt and Road Initiative.

### Introduction

China's expanding influence is significantly impacting the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region, turning it into a hotspot for geopolitical conflict. China's increasing presence and impact in the Indo-Pacific area have garnered growing attention and raised concerns (Fels and Vu, 2016, 3-23). China's assertiveness in its foreign policy and regional engagement has increased over the past ten years (Ji, 2016, 11-19). China's Indo-Pacific Initiative extends its broader ambitions to bolster its global presence and protect its economic and security interests. China's Indo-Pacific Initiative is primarily motivated by its increasing demand for resources and markets to support its economic expansion (Masujima, 2021, 91-120). China's Indo-Pacific presence aims to promote economic cooperation, enhance diplomatic relations, and ensure regional stability (Castro, 2013, 159-160). China's swift economic growth has resulted in a notable rise in energy usage and the requirement for raw materials. As a result, China has adopted a more assertive stance in safeguarding its maritime supply routes and extending its economic influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Ji, 2016, 11-19). China's growing power has sparked strategic, political, and security worries among neighbouring countries and global players. China's increasing military strength, aggressive territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea, and extending the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have impacted the region's strategic balance and security dynamics.

China's aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the South China Sea, has prompted neighbouring countries and global powers to acquaint themselves with the potential threats and maintain a rules-based order. International powers have sought to strengthen their security partnerships and bolster defence capabilities as a countermeasure. This includes the United States, Japan, India, and Australia forming closer strategic cooperation to preserve regional stability. India's top concern will be the disruption caused by China's aggressive border activities and its incursions into the Indian Ocean and South Asia (Chinoy, 2020, 21-35). China's unilateralism has galvanised opponents and sparked a renewed international commitment to a rules-based system, particularly in the South China Sea (Scott, 2012, 85-109). China's rising influence in the Indo-Pacific region has prompted countries in the area, such as Indonesia, as a developing country, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries to recognise the significance of good relations and have been prioritising positive relationships and military association with advanced countries in the region as a strategy for balancing through hedging efforts for maintaining a balance of power and protecting their national interests (Laksmiana, 2011, 95-116).

China's increasing military capabilities, territorial claims, and ambitious Belt and Road Initiative have sparked concerns about its influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Dewita, 2021). In response, neighbouring countries and global powers strengthen their security partnerships and bolster defence capabilities to preserve regional stability. Moreover, the South China Sea has emerged as a significant security hotspot with global implications (Singh, 2012, 116–35). China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific has significantly impacted the region's strategic balance and security dynamics (Mitchell, 2016, 14-15). Indo-Pacific countries are actively enhancing their military capabilities and forming robust defence alliances to safeguard national security and promote regional stability (Dewita, 2021). The absence of a robust security framework in the Indian Ocean region has rendered it susceptible to various conventional and unconventional security challenges. Cooperation agreements in maritime operations, measures to reduce naval risks, deliberations, and conversations over a code of conduct are crucial for upholding peace and security in the Indian Ocean (Menon, 2018, 3-11). The current institutional processes have yet to prove their effectiveness in achieving concrete security results. This paper examines the multifaceted dimensions of China's presence in the Indo-Pacific through a strategic lens, considering its economic, political, and military strategies. This study seeks to elucidate the strategic consequences of China's emergence in the Indo-Pacific region and other areas by examining China's actions, initiatives, and relationships with neighbouring nations.

## Economic Dimension

Currently, China's economic impact in the Indo-Pacific area is highly significant. China's economic influence in the Indo-Pacific area significantly impacts the nature of global commerce and investment. The Belt and Road Initiative programme (BRI) is critical in keeping with China's broader vision for the Indo-Pacific region. China's Indo-Pacific initiative might be interpreted as a calculated and purposeful reaction to multiple causes, including the United States' "pivot to Asia" policy and its efforts to maintain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Hartman et al., 2017). China perceives the United States' increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific region as challenging its influence and interests. China's Indo-Pacific initiative can also be seen as a way for China to counterbalance the influence of other regional actors, particularly India and Japan (Dewita, 2021). China's Indo-Pacific initiative is driven by its need for resources and markets to sustain its economic growth. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which the Chinese government launched in 2013, is an integral part of China's Indo-Pacific initiative. China's Belt and Road Initiative programme (BRI) is a crucial part of its Indo-Pacific Initiative, as it aims to enhance connectivity and trade between China and countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond (Chan, 2018, 104-23).

China strategically invests in infrastructure projects such as ports, railways, and roads, enhancing connectivity and facilitating trade within and beyond. China's economic growth has facilitated enhancing its soft power and reinforcing its diplomatic relations with nations in the Indo-Pacific region (Heng, 2013, 486-513). China's economic initiatives can significantly reshape the Indo-Pacific region's economic terrain. The Belt and Road Initiative can stimulate economic advancement and development in participating countries by enhancing infrastructure and increasing connectivity through its projects.

Concerns exist, nonetheless, over China's economic influence's possible drawbacks. The argument put up by critics of China's economic efforts, especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is that they could result in debt-trap diplomacy, in which recipient nations lose their sovereignty due to excessive debt to China. Concerns exist about how China's infrastructure initiatives in the Indo-Pacific area may affect the environment. Moreover, China's increasing economic influence empowers it to influence regional economic institutions and policies according to its objectives. China's economic activities in the Indo-Pacific region are reshaping the economic terrain by improving connectivity, boosting commerce, bolstering China's influence, and fostering economic growth. As one of China's economic initiatives, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can dramatically expand China's export and investment markets worldwide to exert its influence through diplomatic soft power (Morrison, 2015). Overall, the increasing economic influence of China in the Indo-Pacific area carries substantial consequences for international trade and

investment (Zhai, 2018, 84-92). China's economic growth is strategically reshaping the economic environment of the Indo-Pacific region.

There is additionally apprehension that nations may end up heavily indebted to China, endangering their capability to maintain economic independence (Himmer and Rod 2022, 250-72). The concerns arise from the extensive infrastructure projects funded by China, which necessitate significant investments and could result in unmanageable debt obligations for the countries receiving the funds (Cai, 2018, 831–47). Critics argue that China's debt-trap diplomacy could result in neocolonialism and economic imperialism, as recipient countries may depend on China for financing and resources (Himmer and Rod, 2022, 250-72). These concerns are actively debated, with some questioning the validity of debt-trap diplomacy claims and others calling for greater transparency and accountability in China's regional infrastructure projects (Morrison, 2015). There is no denying that the region has experienced significant advantages due to China's Belt and Road Initiative in terms of economic development and expansion. Roads, trains, and ports are a few examples of infrastructure projects that have improved connectivity and facilitated trade, giving participating nations access to new export and investment markets. The concerns surrounding China's debt-trap diplomacy and its potential consequences for the Indo-Pacific region's economic autonomy and sovereignty are justified (Chellaney, 2021).

#### Political Dimension

In the political realm, China's assertive behaviour has raised tensions and sparked concerns among neighbouring countries and the broader international community in the territorial dispute's region in South China Sea (deLisle, 2012, 608-42). China's creation of man-made islands and military bases in disputed waters has challenged the existing maritime order and led to increased militarization of the region. China's assertive behaviour in territorial disputes has sparked concerns and raised regional stability and global security implications. China's aggressive posturing in the East China Sea and militarization of the South China Sea have gained worldwide attention and worsened relations with nations, and they have far-reaching consequences. Along with worries about overflight on vital marine routes and freedom of navigation, it has caused a change in the power dynamics in the region. The increasing territorial disputes have also sparked concerns about the efficiency of international conflict resolution processes and the probability of judgement errors that could result in violent confrontations.

The global community closely monitors China's assertive behaviour and its implications for regional security. Constructive dialogue and diplomatic solutions are paramount to ensuring stability and peacefully resolving these territorial disputes. Even with these advancements, stakeholders and policymakers must



address the worries raised by China's forceful conduct and seek to promote a cooperative, rules-based system for resolving territorial disagreements in the vicinity. China's assertive conduct in territorial conflicts, particularly about the South China Sea, has raised tensions and sparked concerns among neighbouring countries and the broader international community (Schofield, 2013, 11-16). The conduct above has noteworthy ramifications for both global security and the stability of particular areas, as it entails equipping disputed areas with military capabilities and poses a challenge to the current system governing marine affairs (Singh, 2012, 116-35). China's forceful conduct not only jeopardises the territorial integrity and sovereignty of neighbouring nations but also undermines the concepts of unrestricted movement and pacific means of settlement of disputes.

Moreover, China's forceful approach can disrupt regional alliances and intensify power conflicts. The increasing assertiveness displayed by China in territorial disputes has raised apprehensions regarding the possibility of military conflicts in the region and their consequences for global commerce and security dynamics. Global society should adopt a cohesive position in denouncing China's forceful conduct and underscore the importance of adhering to international law and standards. The rapid ascendance of China as a prominent global force has profoundly transformed the geopolitical terrain, specifically in the South China Sea (Mitchell, 2016, 14-15). China's activities in the South China Sea have upset the existing system of maritime administration and raised concerns about the rule-based order and freedom of navigation for vessels and aircraft in important maritime corridors (AP, March 22, 2022).

The United States, a significant regional actor, must reassess its strategy and approach to effectively address China's assertiveness (Hartman and Searight, 2017). An effective strategy would involve the United States aggressively promoting and fostering multilateral discourse among all concerned nations in territorial disputes (Mastro, 2020). This would entail employing diplomatic initiatives to facilitate peaceful negotiations, upholding compliance with rule-based international law, and formulating a code of conduct to govern activities in the South China Sea. Executing this strategy necessitates fostering trust and cooperation and mitigating the risk of further escalating tensions. To achieve this goal, it would be necessary to manage freedom of navigation operations, assert international rights, fortify alliances and partnerships with regional nations, support capacity-building and maritime security measures, and promote diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes peacefully.

Global collaboration is crucial to effectively managing China's assertive actions in territorial disputes, emphasising the significance of abiding by international laws and norms in resolving disputes. In addition,

China has shown its readiness to employ diverse tactics, including economic and diplomatic pressures, to further its territorial ambitions.

### **Military Dimension**

Concerns about regional stability are greatly impacted by China's attempts to upgrade its military in the Indo-Pacific area. China's capacity to deploy military power and safeguard its stakes in the region has been bolstered by the rapid advancement and modernization of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) (Zhu, 2014, 84-92). China can exert power and safeguard its interests in the region, which has been enhanced by the fast development and modernization of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and by breakthroughs in missile technology and cyber capabilities. China's disputed assertions regarding territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea have been the subject of China's efforts to assert its sovereignty and provide security since 2009.

China has implemented an intensified maritime control policy, which includes the upgrading or construction of new military installations in the Paracel and Spratly islands, as well as the conduct of exercises and patrols in the regional area that is under dispute. In December 2013, China began dredging "sand and gravel on top of the reefs" in the Paracel and Spratly Islands (Southerland and U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2016). In addition, the PLA Navy's South Sea Fleet, has been outfitted with anti-aircraft destroyers. These destroyers are designed to cover the air defence system in the anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) system. Traditional security frameworks need help advancing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, complicating the strategic calculus of regional actors such as the United States of America and its allies. Consequently, the motive behind the A2/AD strategy is to protect China's territorial integrity during times of conflict and to guarantee the safety of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) to protect economic interests during times of peace (Ou, 2014, 81-124).

Admiral John C. Aquilino, the US commander responsible for the Indo-Pacific region, stated that the assertive actions contradicted the earlier assurances by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who had pledged that Beijing would refrain from constructing military installations on artificially created islands within territorial waters. China is also attempting to demonstrate its military prowess through these moves. Aquilino said that China has equipped Fiery Cross Reef, Mischief Reef, and Subi Reef with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment, and aircraft hangers (Gomez & Favila, 2022). He added that the missile systems could easily target any civilian and military planes flying over the disputed waters (Gomez & Favila, 2022).

China asserts its prerogative to develop the islands in the South China Sea based on its discretion, despite allegations from the United States that it has equipped at least three of the constructed islands with military capabilities, thereby violating a previous agreement (AP, March 22, 2022). China's establishment of critical national defence facilities within its borders is an inherent right of every sovereign nation and aligns with international law, rendering it beyond doubt (The Economic Times, March 22, 2022).

China's military may plan to build several overseas naval bases in Asia, Africa, and Oceania. In 2017, China inaugurated its inaugural foreign military base in Djibouti, located on the coast of the Horn of Africa (Reuters, August 1, 2017). Satellite images reveal that two vessels belonging to the Chinese navy have been stationed at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base (Office of the Secretary of Defence USA, Report, 2023). Based on an initial draft of the China-Solomon Islands Security Agreement, China will possess the capability to dispatch armed police and military personnel to the Solomon Islands to aid in preserving law and order. China also plans to expand its military bases in Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

China's endeavours to modernise its military could trigger regional arms race as neighbouring nations feel pressured to bolster their defence capabilities in retaliation. These developments have prompted strategic concerns among major regional powers like the United States, India, and Australia (Baruah, 2020). They are actively trying to counterbalance China's military expansion and maintain regional stability (Zhu, 2014, 43-67). This has spurred significant powers like the United States, Japan, India, Australia, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members to reinforce their involvement and participation in the region as a countermeasure to China's military growth. Consequently, this has resulted in collaborative military exercises, information exchange, and a more cohesive regional security framework among countries with similar interests.

## **Conclusion**

The strategic analysis presented in this paper underscores the complex challenges and opportunities associated with China's involvement in the Indo-Pacific. The upsurge of China and its increasing economic, political, and military involvement in the Indo-Pacific region hold considerable significance. China's Indo-Pacific participation offers advantages and obstacles for the area. China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region has sparked discussions and initiatives aimed at managing and responding to its impact.

While Chinese economic expansion and investments in infrastructure projects can promote development and interconnectivity among regional economies, there are worries about China's economic supremacy affecting smaller economies in the region. To lessen reliance, countries in the area are exploring methods

to broaden their economic ties and engage with China in various ways. This is evidenced by the steps being taken to seek trade agreements with other prominent global actors and attract investment from diverse origins.

China's political influence has significantly changed the balance of power and increased rivalry for control in the Indo-Pacific area. Consequently, nations in the region have implemented varied strategies to protect their interests and uphold a state of equilibrium. Cooperation has been undertaken to establish regional frameworks and alliances that advance transparency, inclusiveness, and adherence to international rules and norms. These measures seek to mitigate any one-sided claims of authority and guarantee that all nations, without consideration of their size, have an influence in determining the future of the region.

The significant implications of China's military presence in the Indo-Pacific region are evident in its military strategies. China's aggression and potential threats to regional stability worry neighbours. To address security issues in the Indo-Pacific, nations have been strengthening their defences, conducting joint military exercises, and forming agreements with other powerful nations to fight China's military growth. This technique promotes a law-based structure and discourages antagonistic behaviours threatening regional stability. As China rises, the Indo-Pacific area should expect more partnership, rivalry, and strategic tactical bargaining as countries manage the complex dynamics.

China's engagement in the Indo-Pacific has complex and far-reaching effects that still shape the area. The region's countries have a complex approach to China's economic, political, and military presence. Engagement, diversification, partnership, and defence preparedness are used. China's ascent must be managed cautiously in the Indo-Pacific. One must balance taking advantage of Chinese involvement's benefits with maintaining the region's sovereignty and stability. The Indo-Pacific region's dynamic developments require ongoing conversations, collaboration, and strategic manoeuvring to manage China's growing influence effectively. China's economic actions could enhance regional growth and provoke worries regarding debt sustainability and geopolitical influence. China's assertiveness in territorial disputes and military modernization increase regional tensions and unpredictability. Understanding China's intentions, strategies, and interactions with other governments is essential to managing regional dynamics and promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Notes

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## **Women As Police: A Sociological Study on Everyday Lives of Women Police in Assam**

**Gayotree Phukon**

### **Abstract**

*Historically, women were excluded from the public domain and basically confined to the domestic domain. However, with the changing times, women are increasingly aware of their rights and the dominating nature of society over every sphere of their lives. Breaking the gender stereotypes, women now enter roles that men conventionally dominate. They are increasingly seen opting for jobs which are traditionally perceived as masculine. The police force is one such example. As patriarchy still operating with its full might, those women who are in the police forces are considered as 'strong' and 'independent' in comparison with other women. This article tries to understand how women police in a male-dominated setup navigate through their everyday lives. An effort has been made to bring out different shades of the personal and professional lives of women police.*

Key words: Women, Police, Gender, patriarchy, everyday life.

### **Introduction**

Women are traditionally confined to the domestic domain, i.e., concentrating on childbearing, rearing, cooking, and other maintenance work. Therefore, they have always been excluded from the public domain, such as involving political and economic activities (Seemanthini 2001, 110). Ortner also argued that women have always been given secondary status in the society (Ortner 1974, 83). She questioned that having equalled thinking power and consciousness as men, why and how women are held to be closer to nature and not culture, unlike men. With this she also explained that women are regarded as nature due to their ability to give birth, and due to the lack of natural creative functions, men try to assert their creativity externally and artificially through the medium of technology and symbols. In various ways, especially women's confinement in the domestic domain would contribute to the view of her as close to natural (Ortner 1974, 80). In doing so, men have all control over the culture, while, by creating human beings, women are limited within nature. However, these cultural creators would not exist without women, and women provide socialisation to them before they enter the cultural sphere. Simone de Beauvoir also points out that it happens because all the conflicts, confusion, and even women's history are described by men (Beauvoir 2011, 11). Women have no history of their own, so they are always treated in society as objects by men, who always see themselves as the subject in society and excluded from the public domain. But women are seen gradually becoming aware of their rights and understanding the dominating nature of men over their



whole lives. They have been trying to claim their economic, social, and political rights. Even where gender domination in certain occupations is rampant due to the boundaries set by the traditional sex-typing of a job, now, breaking those gender stereotypes, women are entering into these jobs. The police force is one such job profile which is traditionally male-dominated. In India, women were first recruited in the police force in around the mid-20th century, which is very late compared to Western countries. In 1938, women first entered the police force in a few provinces and princely states in India (Bhardwaj 1999, 47). After independence, the Delhi Police Force was the first to recruit police women regularly. In 1969, women first joined the police force in Assam (Kakati 2019, 2). The number of joining this challenging profession has been increasing every year. With changing socio-economic and political conditions, policing in the country has undergone various changes. With the increased rate of crime against women and the increased rate of participation of women in demonstrations and agitation, there has been an increasing need for women police to handle and enforce law and order (Joshi 2015, 74-75). This has led to an increase in the number of women police. However, the gender representation is less than satisfactory.

### **Statement of the problem**

In a South Asian rural society like Assam, where women are traditionally household-bound, those who have stepped out from the conventional roles and chosen to work in the police force are considered strong and independent compared to other women. So, the question that arises here is, as a working woman in a male-dominated police force as well as being in a patriarchal society in general, how do they navigate through this layered form of patriarchy in their everyday life? Therefore, the study tries to bring out their strategies to balance their personal or private share and their professional sphere in the police force.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on a qualitative approach, which focuses more on the subjective understanding of a woman police. The research design followed an exploratory research design, focusing on women police's position, status, and management of everyday personal and professional lives. For this study, 6 women police constables and 4 women home guards from a police station in Dibrugarh district, Assam, were selected as respondents. The police colony adjacent to the police station had 15 quarters; 8 women police were lodged in the quarters, and 2 women police resided outside the police colony in rented accommodation. The respondents were first selected through purposive sampling, where, based on understanding the phenomenon, a researcher selects respondents purposively. With the help of the initial contact purposively selected people and key informants, the rest of my respondents were selected through snowball sampling. They belong to different ages and different working positions. The primary data were

collected through fieldwork, where in-depth interviews with the respondents were conducted. An in-depth interview method is a method of data collection which involves an interviewee and interviewer discussing in-depth of a specific topic (Ahuja 2017, 233). To understand the everyday life of women police through their perspectives, in-depth interviews were carried out. Those in-depth interviews were conducted using unstructured interview guides with open-ended questions. To understand the non-verbal activities of the respondents, observation was also used as a tool for data collection in the field. Apart from these, secondary data were collected from books, journal articles, newspapers, and government documents and using information from web pages, which helped to understand the context and concepts of the study in a better way.

### **Ethical consideration**

In this study, the dignity of a respondent was highly prioritised. Before conducting any interview, it was clearly informed to the respondents about the background and purpose of the study before conducting any interview. The interviews and audio recordings were taken with the full consent of the respondents. An assurance was given to them that all the recordings of interviews were meant for the study only. The interviews were taken based on their accessibility and availability. There was always a concern about the confidentiality of the respondent's identity. Therefore, anonymity has been maintained throughout the article.

### **Findings and discussion**

#### **Motivation for joining the police service**

In the era of global capitalism, women, once traditionally dependent on the male members of their families, now can venture into the mainstream workforce (Jayanta 2011, 430). It has brought qualitative changes to social norms and ushered in the freedom of mobility for women by paving the way for working outside the domestic sphere for economic purposes. However, many affluent families still do not allow women to work outside the home as they have ample financial support for the family. Even if some women can work outside, they are still especially not allowed to join physically demanding and masculine jobs like the police force and armed force (Joshi 2015, 74). So, joining the police force can be considered as a radical step. A family's social and economic background can play an important role in women's careers, especially when it comes to working in the police force. Miss Gogoi expressed that she wanted to join the police job because, since childhood, she has seen many of her relatives work in the police force. Since childhood, she has been an expert in sports and has become a district-level player. Through her good performance in sports, she got

the police job. Whereas some women dream of joining the police force and getting support from their families, at the same time, it is seen that the economic factor of a family plays an important role here. Among the ones who reluctantly joined the police force, Miss Sonowal shared that she joined the police because she had to provide financial support for her family. Her father also worked in the police and died just before his retirement. After his death, there was a huge financial trouble in her family as her sister and brother were studying at that time. To support her family financially, she had to apply for a job in the police department. She applied for the post that was lying vacant after her father passed away. She got the job on compassionate grounds as her education qualification was just enough for the job.

### **Existence of 'private patriarchy'**

Working women are economically independent as well as contribute financially to the family's monthly budget. One of the respondents confessed that she is a single earner for her family. She looks after the family and provides for all expenditures. From this case, it is clear that the perception that only a man can work outside and earn for the family is gradually changing. But when analysing the everyday lives of women police, private patriarchy (Walby 1990, 178) is still playing an important role in their position within the family. This private patriarchy is manifested within the household through discriminatory gender expectations and obligations where working women experience unequal marital power and familial oppression in their careers (Ashraf and Jepsen 2024, 31). In the case of women police, it is found that irrespective of the degree of economic independence; women remain under patriarchal control when it comes to decision-making within the family. Miss Gogoi mentioned that in her family, despite being economically independent, the most important decisions depend on her husband's approval. Because there is a fear in her mind that if her decisions are wrong, then her husband will be angry at her. In their extended family, the decision-making power is in the hands of her in-laws. However, this does not mean that her opinions are considered unimportant. But, most of the time, the power of decision-making within the family is with her in-laws and husband. Despite being a working woman, family members and relatives expect her to diligently perform her roles as a mother, daughter-in-law, wife, daughter and sister-in-law, etc. These married working women have multiple expectations and responsibilities imposed upon them simultaneously. However, Miss Gogoi mentioned that sometimes, because of her position as a working woman in the family, she is more important than other women in her family or society at large. They feel that the value of their position is more because of their job. Miss Das noticed that within the family, she is more important than other female members of their house, who are only homemakers. Despite that, she still cannot get an equal position with the male members of her family.

### **Lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure in the workplace**

The government has been trying to provide various facilities for women in the police department. In 2014, under the modernisation of the State Police Force Scheme, the Government of India issued guidelines to state governments on items to be covered under the scheme where it is clearly laid down that police stations constructed under the scheme must include toilet facilities, crèches, and restrooms for women police personnel (Government of India 2014, 2). But they still fail to provide proper facilities for the people who are engaging in this job. A discussion paper on women police in Assam mentions that in most of the police stations, women still face difficulties because of the absence of separate toilets and common restrooms (Borah, Hazarika and Prasad 2016, 19). Those police stations have common restrooms and toilets; most are unhygienic and poorly maintained. Because of exposure to prolonged unsanitary working conditions, many women police suffer from serious health issues. Therefore, the department should address the issue of lack of proper infrastructure and maintain hygiene levels (Borah, Hazarika and Prasad 2016, 19). During the fieldwork, Miss Saikia, a respondent, revealed that during their duty hours, they face difficulties due to hygienic issues in toilets and lack of proper rooms for women. She once had suffered from urinary tract infections, which made her avoid using toilets in the police station. Therefore, after ending their duty hours, they quickly return to their quarters and homes but must report back instantly whenever any emergency arises. She also elaborated on the problems of housing facilities because when she was newly married, she did not get any quarter from the department. Then, when her husband came to visit her, they often stayed in the hostels, which sometimes became very expensive. She also mentioned that due to the lack of facilities in police stations for women, it is difficult for them to go for night duties. Like Miss Gogoi, Miss Tasa identified that the housing facility was particularly problematic when transferring to a new place. There was no official residence available, and they were forced to stay in rented houses till the availability of the official residence. This was costly, and the department made no reimbursement. In rural areas where good houses on rent are not available, accommodation is a major issue. She said that in our societies, people prefer that children stay with their mother rather than their father. So, as a working woman, when she was transferred to different places, her children were also with her and her husband, when he got leave from his job then at that time, he stayed with them. She shared one of her experiences when she got transferred; she found there was a lack of housing facilities under that police station. She explained the difficulties in finding a house in that area and how she managed it.

### **Police services remain a male-dominant field**

In India, where half of the population is comprised of women, there is a poor representation of women in the police force across the states. In a society where there is an increasing rate of crime and harassment related to women, there should be an increasing recruitment rate of women in the police department to maintain peace, protection, and security for women (Borah, Hazarika and Prasad 2016, 4-5). The Government of India has also taken various initiatives emphasising the need for the state to increase the number of women in the police department. Regarding women's representation, The Assam Police Act 2007 also stated, 'The composition of the Police Force shall, as far as possible, reflect the adequate representation of all sections of society, including gender representation' (Government of Assam 2007, 6). But it fails to reach 'adequate' gender representation. In Assam, despite both the Centre and state governments' advice to increase women's representation up to 33 per cent, the percentage still stands at 7.59 per cent (G Plus News 2022, 1). This inadequacy was seen in the selected police station for this study, where the number of male police is 57; on the other hand, the number of women police is 10. It reflected a big gap between the ratio of men and women police. This gap created difficulties in their everyday workspace. Even if they are in the same position as their male colleagues, they do not get that much of the power their male colleagues get due to the number of women. Most women police are in lower positions in service, so they have to listen to everything from their male officers. Overall, men are enjoying full power and authority in this service. They are not only applying power and authority to the public but also to their female colleagues. Women do not have that much power to speak up about their condition in the workplace. Due to the lesser number of women police in the workplace, they also feel insecure and uncomfortable sometimes when there is a large gathering of male colleagues. Miss Deori shared that they go directly to the house after their duty is finished. Sometimes, they feel very uncomfortable with male conversation, even though they have good relations with them. They feel better to avoid that kind of situation. She says that due to their lower position in the police station, she cannot speak up in any decision-making process at the station. She also confessed that women police at the station do some work like making tea and serving glasses of water to the senior officers, which is not their work. Therefore, these women are suppressed by the patriarchal impulses of male colleagues, which have made gender biased within the workspace.

### **The duality between personal and professional life**

The adjustment in both personal as well as professional life is more acute in the case of working women than in the case of their male counterparts. Along with their jobs, there is always a societal expectation of managing household activities from a woman, which is still very high, along with performing and

maintaining a good relationship with their family and playing their role according to their position in the family (Chawla and Sondhi 2011, 342). In the case of women police, when in the family, if there are some family functions and or health issues and she has to be present at that time, sometimes for women police is not possible to give much time for them due to her job condition; because unlike the other government departments police service has no specific office time. Instead of this, they have specific hours of daily duty, and especially when any incident happens in the locality, they must be present when they are called upon. They do not get much leave from duty and no holiday. Therefore, these clashes of time management between personal and professional life create an overburden on them. Although, in some instances, they get support from their partners and family members in coping with their personal and professional lives, they still face difficulties balancing the two.

Miss Chetia explained that her family is nuclear, and her husband works elsewhere. They have a son who is very small now. She says that even though both partners are working, maintaining relationships with relatives and in-laws is more dependent upon her than her husband. Her son stays with her, and his father often visits them when he gets leave from his job, although a very limited number of times. The women mainly take care of the issues related to family and concern for their children. Sometimes, she becomes very worried about her child for not giving proper time due to her duties. Because of these issues, she becomes frustrated and cannot concentrate on her duties. She also emphasised that her in-laws are very particular about her clothes when she visits her in-laws. She does have to follow some restrictions related to her clothes and some practices, but when she is at her own house, she doesn't have to care about such restrictions. But being a man, her husband does not face much in this realm. In most cases, it is found that women, on the one hand, perform the duty of an emotional mother, submissive and ideal daughter, wife and daughters-in-law; on the other hand, in front of the public, they have to maintain their image as a policewoman who supposed to be strong, aggressive and imposing on than other women. A duality of presenting self can be seen in their everyday life. Even during their duty time, when they presented themselves in a role which is expected as stereotypically masculine in front of the public, but at the same within the workplace, these masculine selves became invisible and suppressed by the patriarchal sentiments of masculine men. For instance, as already mentioned, even though they have equal positions to their male counterparts, they have unequal power as compared to their male counterparts. While discussing self-presentation, Erving Goffman mentioned two terms 'Front Stage' and 'Back Stage'; these concepts refer to different modes of behaviour people engage in every life to present the self (Goffman 1959, 144-145). He says there is a front stage and a backstage in every situation and action an individual performs. The front stage is one in which the individual acts with the best ability to impress the people around, remaining

conscious of what to do and what not to do in front of others. The backstage is where the individual can be the way he/she wants to be. Through the analysis of field data, it is found that for these women, the overall period of interacting with the public as police can be considered as their front stage, where they act to the best ability to impress the people around them and are conscious of doing anything in front of others. In front of the public, they present themselves in that self as their work demand; they portray themselves as strong, independent women. But, in reality, these images of women police last for the period on the front stage; once they return to their backstage, i.e., home and within the workspace, they have to return to their true selves where they are suppressed by the discriminatory gender expectations and unequal power relations with their male counterparts.

### **Towards a conclusion**

The study comes to the conclusion that women who have joined the police force have become economically independent, but they still have been suppressed under the existing patriarchal system. Even though they are working women, they are more expected to look after their family than their male counterparts. This sometimes makes it difficult to manage personal and professional lives in their everyday lives simultaneously, and they tend to get overburdened. When they come to the workspace, they also do not get the same power that other male colleagues exercise. The high numerical strength of male police is one of the reasons behind it. The government has been making different laws and amendments related to women who are working in this service. However, the effort towards a systemic change is inadequate so far. The lack of infrastructure in the police stations is a burning issue for all the women police. However, considering all the drawbacks and the breaking of the conventional role of these women through joining a highly men-dominated service, they are becoming economically empowered and contributing to a more inclusive society.

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## Reproducing Counter Narratives and Beyond Normativity: Re-imagining Disability Through Environmental Humanities in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*.

Harsh Prasad and Vivek Singh

### Abstract

*This paper aims to explore a meaningful collaboration between Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities to address the way the body is defined in our social-environment. To question the nexus between nature and society that constructs the discourse of disability, we have chosen to study The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon. The analysis examines the hegemony of normativity and dominant social narratives that marginalises people with disabilities. Drawing on the notion that individuals with disabilities proactively engage with their surroundings, the article demonstrates how the characters' environmental awareness bolsters the necessity of many viewpoints and experiences, therefore redefining disability and autism in a positive light. The primary rationale for analyzing text through the lens of the intersectionality of Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities is to address the interconnected challenges of disability and the environment. Finally, the study shows how rethinking ecological consciousness can offer an alternative view of disability that can counter normativity.*

**Keywords:** Disability, Normalcy, Environment, Humanities, Narrative

### Introduction

In myriad cultural sites, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are primarily guided by the notion of "norm". It identifies who can be considered "normal" and potentially marginalises those who deviate from established standards. Challenging norms has been a catalyst for social movements, driving progress and advocating for social justice. As Davis (2014) opines "the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (24). The Eco-crip perspective allows us to challenge norms, which involves dismantling preconceived notions about ability, disability and their intersection with the environment. This approach challenges the ableist assumptions embedded in societal structures, promoting inclusivity in environmental discourse. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2017) puts it that scope of "Disability Studies has moved out of the applied field of medicine, social work, and rehabilitation to become a vibrant new field of inquiry within the critical genre

of identity studies that has developed so productively in the humanities over the last twenty or so years” (333). It is widely evident that the discourse around Disability Studies, at its core, challenges the conventional notion of ability, normalcy and inclusivity. It grapples with the intricate web of social, cultural, and institutional frameworks that either facilitate or impede the full participation of individuals with disabilities in various facets of life. Disability Studies advocates for a more inclusive society, one that acknowledges and values the diversity of human abilities. On the other hand, Eco-critics broaden the scope of inquiry to encompass the dynamic relationships between humans and their surroundings. This field scrutinises the intricate relationship between ecology, culture, and society, emphasising the symbiotic nature of these relationships. As we grapple with environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution, Environmental Humanities becomes crucial for exploring environmental issues' ethical, social, and cultural dimensions. Kim Q. Hall (2017) asserts that the “devaluation of impurity and changing bodies and places ... has informed heteronormativity, classism, racism, ableism, and sexism” (428). Eco criticism urges us to move beyond a purely scientific understanding of ecological problems and consider the profound implications of these issues on human societies, cultures, and individual lives. Therefore, the merging of both fields represents a natural convergence of inquiries into the human condition. This intersection unveils a rich terrain for exploration, where the experiences of disabled individuals are situated within the broader context of environmental influences.

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2004)* by Mark Haddon offers a unique perspective on the interplay between an individual's cognitive differences and the environment. This novel follows the journey of Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old with Asperger's syndrome, as he investigates the death of a neighbour's dog which died mysteriously. Through Christopher's narrative, Haddon explores the challenges, strengths, and distinctive worldviews that arise from his cognitive condition while also touching on broader environmental themes that impact Christopher's life. At the heart of the narrative is Christopher's unique way of perceiving and interacting with the world. As a protagonist with Asperger's syndrome, Christopher's mind operates with logical precision and a heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli. His narrative, presented in the first person, provides readers with a direct insight into his thought processes, emotions, and sensory experiences. Through this lens, the novel invites readers to reflect on the diversity of cognitive experiences and challenges the conventional understanding of "normalcy." The famous Disability Studies scholar Lennard J Davis (2014) puts it very clearly that we live in a world of norm (23). Normalcy has perpetuated into our every walk of life. The pervasive embrace of normalcy has permeated various facets of our existence.

As Mitchell and Snyder (2017) says, “There is a great need for an ethical methodology from which disabled people can articulate how their lives bring something new to this world that would otherwise go unrecognized” (555). Haddon has used the narrative voice of Christopher as a conduit for exploring the intricacies of Disability Studies. Through his eyes, readers witness the world's order and disorder, providing insights into how individuals with cognitive differences perceive and navigate their surroundings. His meticulous attention to detail, adherence to routines, and heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli offer readers a glimpse into the daily challenges faced by those with Asperger's syndrome. For instance, the inefficiency of the policeman in handling a child with Asperger syndrome is due to the normative construction of society, which does not incorporate within its domain a child who does not fit into the markers set by them. They never received training for treating people other than those whom Rosemary Garland Thomson refers to as “normate”. Therefore, the reason Christopher goes to jail is not entirely his own fault, as he states, “I didn’t like him touching me like this. And this is when I hit him” (Haddon 2004, 8). The novel, therefore, serves as a vehicle for dismantling preconceived notions about neurodiversity, encouraging readers to embrace a more nuanced understanding of cognitive differences.

The environmental aspects of the narrative extend beyond the immediate physical surroundings to the social and cultural environment that shape Christopher's experiences. The novel subtly addresses the environmental challenges faced by individuals with cognitive differences in a society that often struggles to accommodate diversity. For instance, his aversion to crowded and noisy places, a common characteristic of individuals with Asperger's syndrome, highlights the impact of environmental factors on his well-being. The novel subtly prompts readers to consider how the design of spaces, the level of sensory stimuli, and societal expectations affect individuals with cognitive differences. It also encourages readers to reflect on the importance of creating environments that foster inclusivity, understanding, and support for individuals with neurodivergent conditions.

The relationship between animality and disability shares some mutual interconnection but is also a strained one. According to Taylor's (2011) work *Beast of Burden: Disability Studies and Animal Rights*, it is offensive and akin to "de-humanization" when handicapped persons are likened to nonhuman animals. Both disabled and nonhuman bodies become the victim of objectification as disabled bodies are exhibited in freak shows and nonhumans become a source of spectacle in zoos and circuses for entertainment. They have often been subjected to involuntary experimentation. The hierarchical order that places the lives of certain species as more important than others, prevailing in this normative human world, is critiqued by the central character of the story. For Christopher, the life of a dog was as important as any other human's. He mourned when he saw Wellington lying dead and hugged him for four minutes until the owner, Mrs. Shears,

started shouting while running towards him. His genuine concern for the dog is evident from the fact that even Mrs. Shears hesitated to lift Wellington as Christopher stated, "She bent down. I thought she was going to pick the dog up herself, but she didn't. Perhaps she noticed how much blood there was and didn't want to get dirty. Instead, she started screaming again" (Haddon 2004, 4). When he tried to find out the murderer of Wellington, his father advised him not to poke his nose in other people's business and admonished him, saying, "It's a bloody dog, Christopher, a bloody dog." But for Christopher, dogs are important too. Even when Christopher plans to write a detective novel related to the murder investigation of a dog, his Special Education teacher Siobhan tells him, "Readers care more about people than dogs, so if a person was killed in a book, people would want to carry on reading" (Haddon 2004, 5). It's a normative behaviour to draw affinity towards one's ownkind. He knows that laws are too affected by the principle of normativism and wonders "if the police will find out who killed him[dog] and punish the person" for killing a dog is a little crime in such construction. His mourning over the death of a nonhuman individual erroneously makes him a criminal.

Christopher's successful completion of his murder mystery novel with the death of a dog as a central motif questions the set norm. He is more affectionate towards dogs, whom he considers "more interesting than some people" because he finds in them loyalty and faithfulness, which are missing in the ableist world around him. He can easily get attached to nonhuman lives, resisting the speciesism of the normative human world. He seems to challenge the peculiar beliefs at every front of life, such as asking the Reverend Peters questions like "Where is God?" While stating the main reason for hating people, he says that "people do a lot of taking without using any words" (Haddon 2008,14). This shows how indifferent they are towards nonnormative people. His deep interest in nonhuman life is a critique of humans who believe that God put them on Earth "because they think humans are the best animal" (165). This novel shows how disabled people can bring rich perspectives around interdependence, creative ways of mobilizing, and making space for non-normative ways of voicing lived experiences.

The novel also highlights the cruelty that children with disability experience in their day to day life. Christopher is believed to be unable to express his emotions in an appropriate way. Mr. Jeavons, the psychologist at school, finds it very illogical when Christopher explains to him, "why 4 red cars in a row made it a Good Day, and 3 red cars in a row made it a Quite Good Day, and 5 red cars in a row made it a Super Good Day, and why 4 yellow cars in a row made it a Black Day" (Haddon 2004, 24). It shows that Mr. Jeavons is entirely incapable of understanding the thought process of a 'nonnormative' body. Christopher is also being called as "spazzer", which means "spastic", and one of his classmates, named

Terry, says that he will never be able to do anything other than menial jobs like collecting supermarket trolleys or cleaning out donkey excrement at an animal sanctuary. Along with Mr Jeavons' doubt in his ability to become an astronaut, "The crucial point is that the disabled person, as conceived by the nondisabled world, has no abilities or social functions [and] ... those who do perform successfully are no longer viewed as disabled" (Fine and Asch 1998, 12). The category of disability is now no longer applicable, or it is erased as the stereotypical representation requires disabled people to have some exclusive traits, but once they accomplish the task like that of a 'normate' body, they rise above it. The identity as disabled can also be eliminated if one possesses some extra ability to overcome their limitations.

Christopher's journey unfolds within a societal framework that often struggles to accommodate and embrace cognitive differences. The familial aspect of the narrative provides a microcosm of the broader societal challenges in fostering inclusivity. As readers witness Christopher's interactions with his family and neighbours, they are prompted to reflect on how societal attitudes and structures contribute to or obstruct the integration of individuals with disabilities into the fabric of community life. The novel, therefore, becomes a platform for initiating conversations about the societal responsibility to create environments that are conducive to the well-being and inclusion of individuals with neurodivergent conditions. By intertwining family dynamics with broader societal attitudes, the novel expands its exploration of Disability Studies beyond the individual, acknowledging the profound impact of the environment at both the micro and macro levels. Matthew J.C. Cella (2017), in his article "The Ecosomatic Paradigm of Literature," tries to enhance our connection and sense of self, including the natural world and our own bodies. He defines the Ecosomatic paradigm as "The Ecosomatic paradigm assumes contiguity between the mind-body and its social and natural environments; thus, under this scheme, the work of negotiating a "habitable body" and "habitable world" go hand in hand" (169). It will help to deconstruct the norms of embodiment and will also help to promote ethical treatment of the natural world.

The train journey in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* serves as a powerful metaphor that enriches the narrative, providing insights into Christopher's internal world and offering symbolic significance in the exploration of Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities. Christopher's train journey from Swindon to London becomes a central motif in the novel. It represents far more than a physical movement from one location to another; rather, it encapsulates Christopher's personal odyssey, marked by challenges, self-discovery, and the navigation of a world that often seems overwhelming to him.

The train journey also reflects broader environmental challenges faced by individuals with cognitive differences. It serves as a microcosm of the societal and infrastructural barriers that can hinder the inclusion

and accessibility of public spaces for neurodivergent individuals. Christopher's navigation of the train system prompts readers to contemplate the ways in which societal structures can either facilitate or impede the participation of individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life. He locks himself in shelves with cases on the train to feel safe, as he feels uneasy being around so many able-bodied people. "So, I climbed onto the middle shelf and I pulled one of the cases across like a door so that I was shut in, and it was dark and there was no one in there with me, and I couldn't hear people talking, so I felt much calmer, and it was nice" (Haddon2004, 163). He cuts himself off from the rest of the passengers to situate himself in a condition he is more accustomed to. Christopher's successful navigation through various challenges and ultimate completion of his journey also serves as an indicator that individuals with disabilities can achieve optimal performance when provided with a more conducive environment for their accommodation.

However, some scholars, like Kafer (2017) in her article "Bodies of Nature: The Environmental Politics of Disability" posit the limitation of the social model of disability and how it has restricted the discourse of the area to the built environment of buildings, sidewalks, and transportation technology. Therefore, it has prevented Disability Studies from engaging with the wider environment of wilderness, parks, and nonhuman nature because the social model seems to falter in such settings (201). She asserts, "Disability studies could benefit from the work of environmental scholars and activists who describe how social arrangements have been mapped onto the natural environment" (202). Kafer's statement suggests that the 'natural environment' is not much different from the "built environment"; i.e., the natural environment is also "built." Drawing on Nature writers such as Carolyn Finney and Evelyn White, who explain that, due to the history of white supremacist brutality and lynchings in rural regions, African Americans are far less likely than Whites to find parks and open spaces inviting, accessible, or safe. The wilderness is thus less alluring to them. Consequently, white audiences have typically been the target audience for park brochures, wilderness magazines, and outdoor gear advertisements. This shows that the natural environment is shaped by and experienced through presumptions and expectations about gender, sexuality, class, race, and nation, as these examples demonstrate. Who gets access to this wilderness plays a crucial role in defining what constitutes 'nature'. The non-disabled have not only shaped the construction of buildings and parks but have also shaped our perception of the environment itself. The qualities attributed to the wilderness experience, such as spiritual renewal or physical challenge, are able-bodied assumptions and must be interrogated. Drawing upon Linda Vance's idea, she raises some thought-provoking questions like "Whose experience of nature is taken as norm within environmental discourse?" (204). Critiquing Edward Abbey's cult classic where he condemns "industrial tourism" in national parks as destroying wilderness areas across the country,

for which he repeatedly draws on disability metaphors. He refers to cars as "motorised" or "mechanised wheelchairs" and presents cars as having a crippling effect on our ability to experience nature. This shows how disability (wheelchair) becomes a trope to present alienation from nature. He also asks people to come out of their cars/wheelchairs and walk to experience real nature. In such construction, there is no space for a person with mobility impairment to engage or experience real nature. "Walking is both what makes us human and what makes us at one with nature" (Kafer 2017, 206). The deployment of disability in the popular discourse of environment and nature can help us to deconstruct this normative idea. Christopher, though initially hesitant to interact with people because of the difficulties he faces in comprehending the meaning when they use metaphors and cryptic facial expressions to convey their ideas, solves the mystery of the dead dog and overcomes his fear. Christopher's interactions with his environment serve to put his theoretical knowledge of the workings of the world into praxis. Additionally, the interrogation of his neighbours turns out to be the pivotal point in unraveling the quest to identify the murderer of the dog. In the process, he also finds out about his mother's affair with Mr. Shears and his father's lies about his mother's death. Furthermore, it is evident that the neighbours initially mock this odd young man before growing petty when they see how different he is. Except for Mrs. Shears and Mrs. Alexander, others treat Christopher with afflictions. For example, when Mr. Thompson's brother is asked a few questions, he tells Christopher, "Look, son, do you really think you should be going around asking questions like this?" (Haddon 2004, 37). However, his encounter with Mrs. Alexander illustrates the tragic side of his relationship with the world outside his thoughts. She seems somewhat lonely in her dotage and is genuinely grateful for Christopher's company. It is also evident that Christopher's interaction with the natural environment is the same as any other person's. When Siobhan, his special school teacher, asks him to add a description of something interesting or different in his book, he thinks of describing the garden. However, he says, "the garden wasn't very interesting or different. It was just a garden, with grass and a shed and a clothesline" (Haddon 2004, 68). He finds the skies interesting, which seem to him like "someone might have painted them on a big roof" with different types of clouds in it. Christopher possesses a keen insight into nature.

Then I listened to the sounds in the garden and I could hear a bird singing and I could hear traffic noise which was like the surf on a beach and I could hear someone playing music somewhere and children shouting. And in between these noises, if I listened very carefully and stood completely still, I could hear a tiny whining noise inside my ears and the air going in and out of my nose. Then I sniffed the air to see if I could see what the air in the garden smelled like. But I couldn't smell anything. It smelled of nothing. And this was interesting, too. (Haddon 2004, 69).

It is important to add such an elaborated passage from the text because it demonstrates that a person with a disability is equally capable of experiencing nature. As Mei Mei Evans (2002) contends, “One way of understanding the culturally dominant conception of what constitutes "nature" is to ask ourselves who gets to go there” (191-92). Therefore, in the concerted endeavour to subvert normative assumptions, the intentional integration of disability experience emerges as a substantive catalyst, fostering a nuanced reevaluation of societal paradigms within the discourse on inclusion and diversity.

### **Conclusion**

The intersection of Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities has the potential to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between human cognition, societal constructs, and the environment. This interdisciplinary discourse challenges normative perceptions, urging a re-examination of the barriers that separate individuals based on their abilities.

The Eco-Crip perspective allows for a profound critique of ableist assumptions ingrained in societal structures, emphasizing the need for inclusivity in environmental discourse. Literary narratives prove to be a significant vehicle for dismantling preconceived notions about disability, normalcy, and neurodiversity, offering readers a direct insight into the discourses of ability, construction of bodies marked with differences, and cognitive experiences of individuals with conditions such as Asperger's syndrome. Moreover, the environmental aspects of the narrative open a new possibility for Disability studies to extend beyond physical surroundings to encompass the social and cultural environment that shapes our experiences. It is high time to think about how narratives subtly prompt readers to consider how the design of spaces, the level of sensory stimuli, and societal expectations impact individuals with cognitive differences. By doing so, it advocates for the creation of environments that foster inclusivity, understanding, and support for neurodivergent conditions.

A deeper examination of produced literary representations challenges normative orders by questioning the societal hierarchy that places certain lives above others. Christopher's genuine concern for the well-being of a dog and his resistance to speciesism stand as a critique of a normative human world that often fails to recognize the interconnectedness of all living beings. In the broader context of environmental challenges, there are many metaphors interwoven with disabled characters. Engaging with metaphors



reflects the societal and infrastructural barriers that disabled individuals face in navigating public spaces. By analysing the metaphor, we can make people contemplate the ways in which societal structures can either facilitate or impede the participation of individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life. By questioning normative ideas, we can embrace diversity and envision a more inclusive and sustainable society that transcends traditional boundaries of ability and normativity.

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## Identification and Ethnic Categorisation of the Northeast People in Indian Metropolitan Cities

Deepak Kumar

### Abstract

*Everyday racism and events like the 2012 exodus of the Northeast migrants from Bengaluru and Pune and the murder of Nido Tania in Delhi started a rare conversation on racism in India. It started a debate over the emerging Northeast identity. Many scholars argued about the emerging Northeast identity, while others denied it. I suggest that this debate is analytically not helpful—mainly because of the use of the language of identity. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have shown that identity is a deeply ambiguous term, divided between “hard” and “soft” meanings. Looking at both sides of the Northeast identity debate suggests similar ambiguity. Better alternative concepts are identification and categorisation for analysing the formal and informal contexts in which “Northeast” is used, such as routine public interaction, employment, administrative allocation, organised politics, etc. As processual terms, they lack the reifying connotations of “identity.” They do not presuppose that such identification/categorisation will necessarily result in internal sameness and bounded groupness that ordinary people and political leaders take for granted.*

**Keywords:** Northeast; Racism; Situational Identity; Categorisation.

### Introduction

Identity is a very ambivalent concept and could mean many things. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000, 10) have argued that identity is a deeply ambiguous term, divided between “hard” and “soft” meanings. Understood in a strong sense—implying a singular, internal sameness—it tends to mean too much; understood in a weak sense—as multiple, fluid, fragmented—it tends to mean too little. Enough scholarly attention has been paid to the various ethnic, religious, caste and

linguistic identity formations in India. However, few scholars have engaged with the emerging Northeast identity formation in Indian metropolitan cities. Recent scholarly works have been confusing and contradictory. Some argue that there is a strong Northeast identity, while others completely deny it. This article looks at the ongoing debate on the Northeast identity.

The Northeast region—situated at the centre of South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia and consisting of eight Indian federal States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim—had been a destination for hundreds of years for various migrating ethnicities. However, the last few decades, particularly after the 1990s, saw a dramatic change in this trend. People from the region are out-migrating to the big cities for jobs and education. Better connectivity, economic liberalisation, new middle-class aspirations, and changed perception toward the mainland are responsible for this new trend (McDuié-Ra 2017a, 44). However, these new opportunities are not without their problems like racism and discrimination.

Initially, everyday racism did not see many challenges, but events like the 2012 exodus from Bangalore and Pune and the murder of Nido Tania in 2014 proved to be a turning point. People from different parts of the Northeast came together and protested against racism in Delhi and other cities. It started a rare debate on racism in the country. Political leaders and NGOs showed their solidarity with them. These protests forced the union government to form the Bezbaruah Committee to “look into the concerns of Northeastern people living in the other parts of the country.” The committee recommended different steps to deal with such everyday and institutional racism.

These developments led some scholars and commentators to suggest an emerging pan-Northeastern identity in the metropolitan cities. However, given the diversity of the region, many contested this proposition. In this paper, we will look at these issues. The article has three main parts. The first part examines how “Northeast identity” has been conceptualized to mean many things. These different meanings are sometimes diametrically opposite and create conceptual and analytical difficulty. This is mainly because of the categorical confusion between the categories of analysis and practice. Northeast is both a category of analysis and practice, and they influence each other. Following this distinction, the second part looks at how scholars have used the Northeast

category to study and analyze the region's socio-political and cultural aspects and how this has affected the way various actors use the Northeast category in metropolitan cities. The third part looks beyond how various actors use the "Northeast" category for identification and social categorisation. Then, the conclusion looks at the implication of going beyond "Northeast identity."

### **Different Meanings of "Northeast Identity"**

Recent scholarship focuses on the issue of Northeast identity emerging from the shared experience of racism and collective action in the form of protest mobilisations in Indian metropolitan cities. They conceptualised the Northeast identity in various ways. We will look at them in detail and see if the language of identity is analytically helpful.

First, Northeast's "racial identity" is based on their different phenotypes (Bora 2019, 5; Rai 2022, 447). This aspect is so fundamental to identity that it cannot be changed, thus differentiating them from other groups. The absence of the Northeast features from the concept of "Indian face" (Wouters and Subba 2013, 136) does not allow them to blend in with local people the way other non-local people, like a South Indian in Delhi or a North Indian Bihari in Mumbai, can. This absence makes them very visible and, in some cases, vulnerable to discrimination. It also confided them with Southeast Asian and East Asian countries like China, Japan, Thailand, and others. Apart from ordinary people, law enforcement agencies, police, and security guards at museums and art galleries subject them to such "nationality tests." For example, when the Chinese President visited Delhi in 2011, Delhi Police rounded up many Northeast people, thinking they were Tibetan and probably would create some trouble. It makes people from the Northeast a distinct group (Gergan and Smith 2022, 371), and their experience in the city is very different from other groups (McDuie-Ra 2013, 1627). Here, the different phenotypes are understood as foundational to the Northeast identity, differentiating them from other groups.

Second, Northeast identity refers to a unique sameness: a collective shared experience of militarism and racial discrimination (McDuie-Ra 2016, 405). This experience is something Northeast people could relate to, both in the home back and here in the city. Scholars have argued that the origin of racism against Northeast people in the mainland could be traced back to the imposition of laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) 1958 in the region. This

law makes the whole region an exceptional geography where people could be killed on mere suspicion. This law differentiates between people from the North East and the other parts of the country and does not consider them equal citizens. Counter-insurgency tactics like village regrouping in Nagaland and Mizoram (Sundar 2011, 48) and illegal encounters in Manipur and Assam also bring different people from different Northeast States and ethnicities together through shared experiences. Baruah (2008, 165) points out how such laws added with different visual regimes could easily racialise the region. The reports of exotic pictures of the Northeast in newspapers, travel-guide books, TV, films, and stories of soldiers posted in the region for counter-insurgency operations and border security could create an image of the Northeast which is highly stereotyped and racialised. When people from the region travel to the mainland for jobs and education, this racialised image is reproduced in their everyday encounters with locals. Therefore, the shared experiences of racism and militarism bring a specific kind of sameness among them, forming a basis for their shared identity. This sameness is expected to manifest itself in solidarity and collective action.

Third, scholars, commentators, and leaders invoke “Northeast identity” to highlight the processual and interactive development of a collective self-understanding, solidarity, or groupness that can make collective action possible (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 19). Many scholars underline that the Northeast identity is a product of the shared experience of racial discrimination and collective action against the same (McDuie-Ra 2012, 71). After the 2012 exodus and the Nido Tania murder case, people from different parts of the regions and ethnicities come together to show their solidarity with each other (McDuie-Ra 2015b, 314). Moreover, we can also take the more recent case of a Twitter storm after a teenage gamer questioned the nationality of an MLA from Arunachal Pradesh. Here, identity is understood as a result of the collective action and a basis for further such mobilisations.

Fourth, the Northeast identity is situational (Rai 2023, 3285). It matters only in the metropolitan cities rather than in the region itself. This phenomenon in metropolitan cities is undeniably a new form of identity formation. However, it does not correlate with the dynamics of identity politics prevalent back home, which is underlined by divergence rather than a confluence of interest (Nongbri and Shimreiwung 2017, 5). These things are temporary, and there is no long-term

solidarity. Moreover, whenever a collective action takes place, it is mostly in big cities. Here, Northeast identity is understood in a temporary, fluctuating, and unstable sense. It is not “the identity” but one among many identities people could have (Haokip 2012, 84; Ngaihte 2013, 13).

Fifth, some sceptics do not believe that there is any possibility of a “Northeast identity.” Northeast India is a diverse region, and putting it under one category ignores the complex relations among various communities of the region. They argue that regarding the Northeast as a singular entity implies a homogeneity predominantly comprised of individuals of the “mongoloid race,” which would unfairly disregard the diversity of its people. The area has witnessed conflicting identity claims among its communities, which is evident in ongoing interstate border disputes. Embracing a single Northeast identity raises concerns for minority groups within the region. Similarly, there are aspirations among ethno-nationalists for the establishment of ethnic homelands. Sceptics perceive this stance as a strategy advanced by dominant groups, reinforced by backing from the Indian government and the media (Ngaihte and Hanghal 2017, 39).

We can see that Northeast identity is used to mean many things: something fundamental as a specific kind of phenotype which differentiates the Northeast people from the other parts of the country, the sameness of shared experience, collective action based on similar experiences, a situational identity that changes as one move from home to big cities and vice versa, and no pan-Northeast identity at all. Different usages of the Northeast identity sometimes converse and, at others, diverge from each other. If the first three meanings have some connection, they differ from the four usages. However, they contradict the fifth meaning, which rejects such an idea altogether. There is so much ambiguity. Depending on one’s point of view, Northeast identity could or could not exist; even if it does, it could do so in different ways.

### **Northeast as a Category of Analysis**

Many key concepts in the social sciences, such as race, nation, and ethnicity, serve dual roles as both categories of socio-political practice and analysis. When we refer to “categories of practice,” we are implying what others have termed folk or lay categories—developed and deployed by ordinary people to make sense of everyday social experience. They are different from the more detached categories employed by social analysts (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4). Everyday use of

categories like race, ethnicity, and identity are often reifying and essentialising. When analysts use the categories and their meanings in the same fashion as ordinary people or political leaders, they reproduce those essentialising usage. As social scientists, we study those everyday common-sensical usages rather than reproducing them.

Similarly, “Northeast” is a category of analysis and socio-political practice. The continuous traffic between the two in both directions introduces the possibility of adopting pre-existing categories derived from journalistic, political, or social common sense as our analytical category (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4). Scholars and commentators have used the Northeast category for socio-political analyses. Only after people from the region started migrating to the mainland in large numbers, the Northeast became an identification category to identify and categorise people as Northeasterners, especially after the significant events and protests in the early 2010s. We can see this change in how the Northeast is used in politics, administration, media, economic niches, academic writing, and everyday interaction.

Self-identification and categorisation are some of the most important contexts in which Northeast is used as a category of practice. This usage is often influenced by how scholars have analytically used the Northeast category. Writing on the Muslims in European countries, Brubaker (2013, 5) suggests that the scholars as analysts of the socio-political process have also “contributed to producing Muslim as a category of practice. It has involved re-labelling immigrant populations, producing public representations of them, and generating knowledge about them. Therefore, scholars have been party to this ongoing process.” We could see similar things in the Northeast category. Kham Khan Suan Hausing (2015, 278) argues that the ‘Northeast’ category has been descriptively and analytically used and framed over time to suit the integration framework. Scholarly literature on Northeast India broadly encompasses nation-building, ethnicity, development, conflict, and insurgency (Hausing 2015, 279).

As a descriptive term, it is used as an administrative category for regional inter-state development and security coordination (Hausing 2015, 279). The creation of the North Eastern Council in 1971 and a separate department and a Union ministry in the early 2000s solidified the distinctiveness of this category. Additionally, “Northeast” has historically been used as a “frontier” designation,



denoting a geographically delineated non-state territory inhabited by “savage, wild, and backward” hill tribes since colonial times (Baruah 2020, 27). These tribes were culturally marginalised as “others” compared to the inhabitants of the valleys. Post-independence, the term gained significance in the context of Naga and Mizo nationalist movements, driven by efforts to foster national integration by celebrating unity in diversity (Hausing 2015, 279).

Furthermore, Analytical concepts such as “durable disorder,” “troubled periphery,” and “geographies of distance”, among others, have been employed to comprehend the dynamics of the Northeast region. These terms highlight the enduring presence of separatist violence, conflicts both between and within ethnic groups, issues related to “illegal” migration, challenging demographic patterns, insurgency, and the imposition of extraordinary laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Hausing 2015, 279). These debates have profoundly impacted how the Northeast is seen in the mainland. Apart from categories of these debates, dominant categories which try to describe and explain the everyday experiences of Northeast people vary from “race” to cultural ignorance. Given the contested nature of these categories, we should be careful what categories we use for our socio-political analysis.

### **Identification and Ethnic Categorisation**

As a category of practice, “Northeast” serves as a means for individuals to identify themselves and be categorised by others. Like all identity categories, self-identifications and the categorisation by others are interconnected (Jenkins 1994, 211). How individuals perceive themselves is heavily influenced by the predominant ways in which others categorise them. Conversely, the categorisation by others can be influenced by the prevailing modes of self-identification, particularly those publicly proclaimed as collective self-identification (Jenkins 1994, 212).

There can be many reasons for self-identification as a Northerner: racism and stereotyping, collective action, public discourse, and so on. Northeast has been referred to as belonging to a specific geographical area and constituting a community. In the latter sense, it could respond to the hegemonic other-identification/categorisation, especially when it is powerfully stereotyping and has real consequences on people’s lives. Scholars and various news reports have shown that Northeast people are highly stereotyped (Pachau 2014, 37). While events like the 2012 exodus

and the murder of Tania attract media attention, it is everyday racism that is damaging. This type of characterisation led local people to moral police their practices and food choices, deny housing, and question their nationality. Such misrecognition led many people to assert Northeast identification vis-à-vis the mainland.

If the collective action was a turning point in the self-categorisation of Northeasterners, there were other reasons like a shift in public representation and an emerging discourse on racism and the Northeast through which people from the region formulated their interests and self-identification (McDuie-Ra 2016, 405). It is true that most people were/are ignorant about the history, culture, and politics of the Northeast. Nonetheless, the protests started a rare conversation over racism and the Northeast. TV news debates, newspaper editorials, blogs, and social media activism played a crucial role. While individuals come from different tribes, states, and ethnic categories, they were identified and labelled as Northeastern. This hugely impacted how people would perceive and identify someone from the Northeast region. In such a situation, it was easy and convenient to categorise/identify people simply as Northeastern. Moreover, once the Northeast became an accepted category to formulate concerns and interests, it was better to identify oneself as Northeast to communicate with them.

There could be many contexts of identification/categorisation from outside. For the Northeast, those contexts are colonial racialisation, employment, government funding, social policy, and organised politics. Colonial racialisation of the Northeast people is one crucial context of social categorisation. They are often categorised as the “Mongoloid race” as opposed to the “Aryan race” or the “Dravidian race.” The classification of the Northeast people as a “Mongoloid race” has its origin in colonial race theories (Sharma 2011, 205). Scholar-officials like George Campbell, William Hunter, Herbert Risley, and Edward Gait perceived the Indian subcontinent as a complex social structure primarily delineated by racial distinctions. They propagated a notion of a hierarchical caste society, defined by Brahminical ideals, where those of “superior Aryan blood” occupied the top with a clear ethnological separation from aboriginal populations, tribal communities labelled as “wild,” and individuals of mixed racial heritage classified under the umbrella term of “Mongoloid races” (Sharma 2011, 205). Colonial speculations, driven by utilitarian objectives such as administrative efficiency and the procurement of inexpensive labour

for industries like tea plantations, underscored these racial categorisations. In 1935, the Deputy Commissions of Naga Hills and Lushai Hills argued for excluding these areas from the political reforms based on racial, among other, differences. While it was a product of colonial race science and has no scientific basis, just like any other racial category, its use has continued till today. When Northeast people come to the mainland for jobs and education, they are often categorised as “Chinki” and “Corona,” referring to the previous mongoloid racial origin (Haokip 2021, 358).

Employment represents a distinctive aspect of market relationships prevalent in modern, industrialised societies. It can manifest in both informal and formal arrangements. In ethnically diverse labour markets, ethnic categorisation holds significant influence over the allocation of job opportunities to job-seekers by individuals authorised to make recruitment decisions (Jenkins 1994, 213). This practice is evident from the niche created by the Northeast migrants, where employers in the service sector try to exploit their English language skills or phenotypes to look more cosmopolitan. The demand for Northeast labour is so high that employers travel to the region to hire people directly (McDuie-Ra 2017a, 57). Moreover, state agencies like the Delhi Police, following the recommendations of the Bezbaruah Committee Report, hire young men and women as recruits.

Social policy and government funding play an increasingly significant role within modern states, extending their influence across various aspects of society. It is crucial to recognise their importance in shaping the everyday experiences of individuals belonging to a social category. Administrative allocation and government funding are a privileged context for transforming the nominal category into a more real one. It is an authorised, officially legitimate categorisation from which consequences flow (Jenkins 1994, 213). After the protests, the union government formed a twelve-member committee to examine Northeast people’s concerns in metropolitan cities. The committee recommended various remedial measures the government could take to end racial discrimination (Bezbaruah 2014, 15). The Ministry of Home Affairs created a special police cell and helpline for the Northeast people to tackle everyday security issues. Moreover, Delhi Police recruited new personnel from the Northeast region to be more representative. Apart from these, a new scholarship scheme-*Ishan Uday*- for students from the Northeast, separate hostels on university campuses, new centres for Northeast studies (Hausing 2015, 280), and cultural events

like the Northeast festival are all funded by the government on the recommendations of the Bezbaruah committee. This hugely influences how other people and institutions identify people from the Northeast and label their cultures, practices, etc. Subsequently, it influences the self-categorisation of the Northeast people.

## **Conclusion**

What is the point of all this? Why do we need to use identification and categorisation instead of identity? Doing so has at least four implications on how we see the Northeast category when we use it to identify people from the region. First, as processual terms, they lack the reifying connotations of “identity.” They do not presuppose that such identification/categorisation will inevitably lead to internal uniformity and bounded groupness that ordinary people and political leaders take for granted. Second, it solves the difficulty of choosing only one identity between Northeast and ethnic/tribal identity. One can self-identify as Naga, Mizo, Assamese, Kuki, or Chakma even when identifying as a Northeasterner. It answers the question of sceptics who argue that there cannot be a Northeast identity because it is too diverse or unjust for small communities. Third, collective action and protests were important turning points in shaping the public discourse and how people see the Northeast and its issues. But we cannot take those extraordinary groupness and collective action events for granted that they happened out of nowhere. Using the Northeast category, we can ask how it was used to mobilise people and invest in groupness. It helps us to explore such political mobilisation in more detail. Fourth, we can study the journey of the Northeast category in metropolitan cities and how it comes to use in everyday interactions and used by various actors for different purposes. People in their day-to-day interactions use it to identify and categorise people from the Northeast. Students and ethnic organisations use it for mobilisations; political parties use it to persuade people to vote for them; service sector companies use it to employ people; the government uses it to initiate and fund many schemes. Therefore, using the Northeast category is more analytically helpful in understanding its various usages and transformations over time without getting trapped in the debate over a single and concrete pan-Northeast identity.

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## UCC for Gender Justice: Promoting Women's Rights and Addressing Socio-political Challenges in India

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### Abstract

*The implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India aims to replace religion-based personal laws with a unified legal framework, promoting gender equality and modernity. This paper explores the potential benefits of UCC for women's rights, the socio-political challenges it faces, and strategies to overcome these obstacles. Drawing on the experiences of states like Goa and Uttarakhand, which have taken steps towards UCC, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of how UCC can be pro-women. It highlights the role of public awareness campaigns, inclusive policymaking, incremental implementation, and judicial support in achieving this goal. The paper argues that UCC is essential for dismantling systemic gender biases in personal laws, ensuring equal rights for all citizens, and fostering an inclusive, equitable society. By addressing cultural and religious concerns through strategic measures, India can fulfil its constitutional promise of equality and justice for all.*

**Keywords:** UCC, Women's rights, Personal laws, social challenges, Gender justice.

### Introduction

The proposal for a UCC in India aims to create a cohesive set of laws for personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, applicable to all citizens regardless of their religion. This initiative seeks to replace existing religion-based personal laws, which often lead to gender inequalities, with a unified legal framework ensuring equal rights for all. The UCC is referenced in Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, which urges the state to strive for a UCC for all citizens. The implementation of UCC has sparked significant debate since the Constitution's inception, with figures such as, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar advocating for its adoption to promote social justice and gender equality (Parameswaran, 2020, 15).

Recently, the debate surrounding the UCC has resurfaced and has become a relevant issue in India and many states have started to seriously consider its implementation. The discourse gained significant momentum when

the Uttarakhand government constituted a committee in 2022 to examine the feasibility of UCC, marking a decisive step towards legal uniformity. Goa, having implemented UCC, sets a precedent, and states like Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat have also expressed interest in adopting UCC. This growing trend reflects increasing admiration from women's organisations and civil society, who view UCC as essential for modernising India's legal system and ensuring gender justice.<sup>1</sup>

Proponents argue that UCC is crucial for addressing gender disparities inherent in personal laws derived from religious traditions. For example, Muslim personal law permits polygamy and grants unequal inheritance rights, while Hindu personal law historically denied women the right to inherit property. By replacing these disparate laws with a uniform code, UCC aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination and provide equal legal protection to all women, aligning with the constitutional mandate of equality before the law (Article 14). However, the implementation of UCC is not without challenges. Religious fundamentalists and communities perceive it as an encroachment on their cultural and religious autonomy. Critics argue that UCC may undermine India's pluralistic ethos by imposing a homogenised legal system on a diverse society. Additionally, political opposition and the potential for communal backlash have historically hindered efforts to implement UCC.

To navigate these challenges, it is crucial to adopt a phased and inclusive approach. Public awareness campaigns, inclusive policymaking involving religious leaders and community groups, and incremental implementation can help build consensus and mitigate resistance. The judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, has played a pivotal role in advocating for UCC through landmark judgments such as the Shah Bano case (1985) and the Sarla Mudgal case (1995), emphasising the need for a uniform legal framework to protect the rights of women and promote national unity (Mandal, 2018). This paper is significant in addressing the current debate on UCC by examining its potential benefits for gender justice and the social challenges it faces. It aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how UCC can promote equal rights for women, using the experiences of states like Uttarakhand as case studies. Additionally, the paper proposes strategies to overcome the resistance from religious communities and political obstacles, offering practical solutions for a phased and inclusive implementation.

## **UCC and its History in India**

The proposal for a UCC in India aims to create a unified set of laws governing personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, applicable to all citizens regardless of their religion. This initiative seeks to replace the current religion-based personal laws, which often result in gender inequalities, with a single



legal framework that ensures equal rights for all (Menon, 2014, 483). The concept of the UCC is embedded in Article 44 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution, which directs the state to work towards securing a UCC for all citizens throughout India (Ahmed, 2000, 549). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a key architect of the Indian Constitution, was a strong advocate for a UCC, believing it essential for unifying the nation's legal framework and promoting social reform. During the Constituent Assembly debates, Ambedkar emphasized that UCC was crucial for achieving national unity and gender equality (Kumar, 2022, 136).

Despite Ambedkar's advocacy, the inclusion of UCC in the Directive Principles rather than as a Fundamental Right was a compromise due to intense opposition from various quarters. Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly, in particular, were concerned that UCC would infringe upon their religious freedom and personal laws derived from Sharia. These debates highlighted the challenges of reconciling secular legal reforms with India's religious and cultural diversity. The primary challenges during the Constituent Assembly debates included religious opposition, political compromise, and cultural sensitivities. Minority communities, especially Muslims, feared that UCC would undermine their religious autonomy and impose majoritarian Hindu norms on them. To avoid alienating minority communities and to ensure the passage of the constitution, the framers decided to place UCC in the Directive Principles, making it a non-justiciable goal rather than an enforceable right (Rangathan, 2022, 416).

In recent years, the debate surrounding UCC has resurfaced and become a relevant issue in India, as many states have started to seriously consider its implementation. The discourse gained significant momentum when the Uttarakhand government constituted a committee in 2022 to examine the feasibility of UCC, marking a decisive step towards legal uniformity.<sup>2</sup> The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has consistently supported UCC as part of its broader agenda of national integration and legal reform. The BJP argues that UCC is essential for achieving true secularism and gender justice. Conversely, the Indian National Congress (INC) and other secular parties have been more cautious, emphasising the need to respect India's religious diversity and avoid alienating minority communities (Sharma, 2023, 3). The political reluctance to implement the UCC is exemplified by the Shah Bano case (1985). In this case, a Supreme Court ruling favouring a Muslim woman's right to maintenance was effectively nullified by the Rajiv Gandhi-led INC government. This government action, influenced by pressure from conservative Muslim groups, resulted in the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 (Hasan, 2004, 47). This incident underscores the political challenges and communal sensitivities that have consistently obstructed efforts to implement the UCC.

## **The Importance of UCC for Gender Justice in India**

Personal laws in India, which govern matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, have historically posed significant obstacles to achieving gender justice. These laws, rooted in religious doctrines, often perpetuate gender inequalities. Hindu personal laws, for instance, have traditionally favoured men in matters of inheritance and guardianship, thereby limiting women's rights and autonomy (Mazumdar and Gupta, 2011, 12). Similarly, Muslim personal laws have been criticised for practices such as polygamy and unilateral divorce (triple talaq), which have led to substantial gender disparities. These personal laws, by being deeply rooted in religious and cultural norms, resist reforms and perpetuate patriarchal values, thus hindering the realisation of gender equality (Jain, 2018, 8).

The proposal for implementing a UCC seeks to address these challenges by introducing a unified set of laws that apply to all citizens, regardless of their religion. This approach aims to replace the current personal laws, ensuring equal treatment under the law and eliminating the gender biases that are prevalent in the existing system. The UCC is seen as a constitutional mandate to promote equality and justice, as enshrined in the Indian Constitution (Chandpuri, 2021, 1012). By providing a uniform legal framework, the UCC is supposed to safeguard women's rights and promote gender justice by ensuring that all individuals are subject to the same legal standards, thereby eliminating the discriminatory practices allowed under personal laws (Ghosh, 2018, p. 85). The need for a UCC is underscored by the inconsistencies and biases in current personal laws. For instance, the Hindu Succession Act, despite amendments, still reflects a bias in favour of male heirs, and Muslim personal laws continue to uphold practices like triple talaq, which have been deemed unconstitutional but, are still practised in some communities (Choudhury, 2008, 11). The UCC would provide a secular legal system that upholds individual rights over religious dictates, aligning India's legal framework with its commitment to international human rights standards (Afaq & Dari, 2023, 5).

Moreover, the UCC would facilitate a more inclusive and just society by ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their religious background, have equal legal protections and responsibilities. This move towards a common civil code is not only a step towards gender equality but, also towards national unity and integrity, as it promotes a sense of common citizenship. By eliminating legal distinctions based on religion, the UCC would foster a more cohesive and egalitarian society. Critics argue that the UCC might infringe upon religious freedoms and cultural practices (Choudhury, 2008, 13). However, the core objective of the UCC is to protect individual rights and ensure gender justice, which are fundamental to any democratic society. The debate around the UCC often

highlights the tension between religious autonomy and individual rights, but the need for a fair and just legal system that promotes gender equality should take precedence (Chandpuri, 2021, 1015). Therefore, the implementation of a UCC in India is essential for overcoming the gender inequalities perpetuated by personal laws. It would establish a more just and equitable society for all citizens, ensuring that gender justice is upheld in all aspects of life. By replacing discriminatory personal laws with a common civil code, India can move towards true gender equality and fulfil its constitutional promise of justice and equality for all (Ghosh, 2018, 100).

### **Social and Political Challenges of UCC in India**

The implementation of UCC in India, aimed at replacing the myriad of religious personal laws with a unified set of laws governing personal matters, faces significant social and political challenges. These challenges stem from the country's diverse religious landscape, cultural sensitivities, and political dynamics. One of the foremost social challenges is the strong opposition from religious communities. India is home to a multitude of religions, each with its own set of personal laws deeply intertwined with religious and cultural identities. Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and other religious communities have personal laws derived from their respective religious texts and traditions. The proposal to replace these with a UCC is seen by many as an attack on their religious freedom and cultural autonomy. Muslim leaders, in particular, view the UCC as an attempt to impose Hindu norms and undermine Islamic law (Huggi, 2021, 13). This perception fuels resistance and fear among minority communities, making consensus-building a significant hurdle.

The cultural diversity in India means that personal laws are not just legal frameworks but also cultural practices that have evolved over centuries. Practices related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption are deeply embedded in cultural traditions. For example, the Hindu joint family system has unique inheritance practices that differ from those of other religions. Implementing a UCC would require altering these deeply ingrained practices, which could lead to cultural dislocation and resistance from communities who see these practices as integral to their identity (Tiwari, 2019, 43). There is also a widespread lack of awareness and numerous misconceptions about what a UCC entails. Many people, especially in rural areas, are not fully aware of the potential benefits of a UCC for gender equality and justice. Misconceptions fuelled by misinformation and political rhetoric create a climate of fear and resistance. Public awareness campaigns are necessary to educate people about the objectives and benefits of UCC, but changing deep-seated beliefs and ingrained perceptions is a slow and challenging process (Ranganathan, 2022, 418).

The political landscape in India adds another layer of complexity to the implementation of UCC. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been a staunch advocate of UCC, viewing it as essential for national integration and gender justice. However, the Indian National Congress (INC) and other secular parties have been more cautious, emphasising the need to respect India's religious diversity. The INC's stance has often been influenced by the need to maintain electoral support from minority communities, who fear that UCC would undermine their religious freedoms (Sharma, 2023, 4). This ideological divide creates a polarised political environment where consensus on UCC is difficult to achieve. The political challenges associated with UCC can be traced back to significant historical precedents. The reluctance to implement the UCC can be significantly attributed to the Shah Bano case (1985). In this case, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of granting maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman, leading to considerable backlash from conservative Muslim groups. Consequently, the Rajiv Gandhi-led INC government responded to this pressure by passing the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, which effectively overturned the Supreme Court's decision (Hasan, 2004, 44). This episode illustrates the political challenges and communal sensitivities that have historically impeded the adoption of the UCC. This incident highlights how political considerations and communal pressures could undermine judicial efforts to promote gender justice through UCC. Even if there is political will, the legislative process of drafting, debating, and passing a UCC is fraught with bureaucratic challenges. Lawmakers must ensure that the UCC respects the cultural sensitivities of all communities while upholding the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. Achieving this balance is a complex task that requires extensive consultations, negotiations, and compromises. Moreover, the implementation of UCC would require a robust legal and administrative framework to handle the transition from diverse personal laws to a uniform code, which could strain the existing legal infrastructure.

### **Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Implementing UCC in India**

The implementation of a UCC in India faces significant social and political challenges. These challenges, however, can be effectively addressed through a combination of public awareness campaigns, inclusive policymaking, incremental implementation, and judicial support. This strategic approach can help build consensus, mitigate resistance, and pave the way for a more equitable legal system.

### **1. Public Awareness Campaigns**

One of the primary strategies to overcome the challenges associated with implementing UCC is to conduct extensive public awareness campaigns. These campaigns need to focus on educating the populace about the benefits of UCC, particularly in promoting gender justice and equality. Misconceptions about UCC being an infringement on religious freedom need to be addressed head-on. Effective public awareness campaigns can utilise various media platforms, including television, radio, print media, and social media. Documentaries, panel discussions, and interviews with legal experts, women's rights activists, and community leaders can help demystify the concept of UCC. Highlighting case studies and success stories from regions like Goa, where UCC has been successfully implemented, can provide concrete examples of its positive impact (Gupta, 2023). Educational institutions should also play a significant role in disseminating information about UCC. Schools and universities can incorporate discussions on UCC into their curricula, encouraging students to think critically about the importance of legal equality and gender justice. Public forums and workshops can be organised to facilitate open dialogues between various stakeholders, including religious leaders, community groups, and the general public. Such initiatives can help build a broader understanding and acceptance of UCC by addressing fears and dispelling myths.

### **2. Inclusive Policymaking**

Inclusive policymaking is essential for the successful implementation of UCC. Engaging religious leaders, community groups, and women's organisations in the dialogue is crucial to building consensus and ensuring that the concerns of all stakeholders are addressed. The government should adopt a participatory approach, where the voices of different communities are heard, and their perspectives are considered in the drafting and implementation of UCC. Creating a national task force comprising representatives from various religious and community groups, legal experts, women's rights activists, and government officials can facilitate this inclusive dialogue. This task force can work towards identifying common ground and developing a UCC framework that respects cultural diversity while ensuring gender equality. Regular consultations and meetings can help build trust and cooperation among stakeholders, reducing resistance and fostering a sense of ownership over the reform process (Agnes, 2011, 57). Women's organisations and civil society groups can play a vital role in advocating for UCC. These groups can mobilise support at the grassroots level, ensuring that the voices of marginalised and vulnerable women are included in the policy-making process. By working

closely with these organisations, the government can develop a UCC that is not only legally sound but also socially acceptable.

### ***3. Incremental Implementation***

A phased or incremental approach to implementing UCC can help address concerns and reduce resistance. Gradually introducing UCC provisions, allows for adjustments and accommodations to be made based on feedback and experiences from initial stages. This approach also provides time for public education and consensus-building, making the transition smoother and more acceptable to various communities. The implementation can begin with less controversial aspects of personal laws that already have broad support for reform, such as inheritance and property rights for women. By demonstrating the benefits of these initial changes, the government can build momentum and public support for more comprehensive reforms. Pilot projects in selected states or regions can serve as testing grounds for UCC implementation, allowing for the identification and resolution of potential challenges before a nationwide rollout (Manooja, 2000, 33). Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process are crucial. Establishing a feedback mechanism where citizens can report issues and provide suggestions can help refine the UCC framework and address any unintended consequences. This iterative process ensures that the UCC evolves in a manner that is responsive to the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

### ***4. Judicial Support***

The judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India, has played a pivotal role in advocating for the implementation of UCC. Over the years, the Supreme Court has delivered several landmark judgments emphasising the need for a uniform legal framework to ensure gender equality and protect women's rights. These judicial interventions have highlighted inconsistencies and discriminatory practices in personal laws, calling for legislative reforms to establish uniformity. For instance, in the Shah Bano case (1985), the Supreme Court upheld the right of a Muslim woman to receive maintenance from her husband after divorce, underscoring the importance of gender justice over personal laws (Supreme Court of India, 1985).<sup>3</sup> More recently, the Court's decision to abolish the practice of triple talaq (2017) further reinforced the need for uniform legal provisions to protect women's rights (Supreme Court of India, 2017).<sup>4</sup> These judgments serve as important precedents and provide a legal foundation for advocating the implementation of UCC. The judiciary can continue to play a proactive role by issuing directives and guidelines to the government for the gradual implementation of UCC. By interpreting the constitutional provisions related to equality and non-

discrimination, the Supreme Court can guide the legislative process and ensure that UCC aligns with the principles of justice and gender equality enshrined in the Constitution (Agrawal, 2022, 36).

Therefore, the successful implementation of UCC requires a multifaceted approach that includes public awareness campaigns, inclusive policymaking, incremental implementation, and robust legal and institutional support. By educating the public, engaging stakeholders, and adopting a phased approach, the government can build consensus and reduce resistance to UCC. The judiciary and legislative bodies play a critical role in shaping and enacting the new legal framework, while national commissions and women's organisations provide essential support and advocacy. Together, these strategies can pave the way for a UCC that ensures gender equality and justice for all citizens, fulfilling the constitutional promise of equality before the law. By addressing the social and political challenges through these strategic measures, India can move towards a more equitable legal system that upholds the rights and dignity of all its citizens, ensuring that gender justice becomes a reality.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of UCC is a pivotal step towards achieving gender justice and ensuring equal rights for all citizens in India. By replacing religion-based personal laws with a unified legal framework, UCC can eliminate the systemic gender biases that have historically disadvantaged women, particularly within Hindu and Muslim communities. Despite the significant social and political challenges, including religious opposition, cultural sensitivities, and political resistance, the potential benefits of UCC in promoting gender equality are undeniable. A comprehensive approach involving public awareness campaigns, inclusive policymaking, incremental implementation, and judicial support is essential for overcoming these challenges. Public awareness campaigns can educate the populace about the benefits of UCC and dispel misconceptions, while inclusive policymaking ensures that the concerns of all stakeholders are addressed, fostering a sense of ownership and cooperation. Incremental implementation allows for gradual adjustments and accommodations, making the transition smoother and more acceptable to various communities. Judicial support, through landmark judgments and proactive directives, can guide the legislative process and ensure that UCC aligns with the principles of justice and equality enshrined in the Constitution.

The experiences of states like Goa and recent developments in Uttarakhand demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of UCC. These examples highlight how UCC can promote legal consistency and protect the rights of women, serving as models for other states to follow. By addressing the social and political challenges through

these strategic measures, India can move towards a more equitable legal system that upholds the rights and dignity of all its citizens. Ultimately, the UCC is crucial for dismantling the entrenched gender biases in personal laws and fostering an inclusive and equitable society. It aligns with the constitutional mandate of equality before the law and has the potential to transform the socio-legal landscape of India. By ensuring equal rights and protections for all women, regardless of their religious backgrounds, UCC can contribute significantly to the socio-economic development and empowerment of women, thereby promoting a more just and progressive society. This paper has aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the UCC debate, offering practical solutions for its implementation and highlighting its relevance in contemporary India. Through informed policymaking and sustained efforts, the vision of a uniform legal code that guarantees gender justice can become a reality, fulfilling the constitutional promise of equality and justice for all citizens

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## **(Re)telling Memories: Narrative Reconstruction of the Past in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin***

**Diganta Deka**

### **Abstract**

*Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin (2010) explores the intricate relationship between memory and narrative in the context of the Palestinian experience. The novel scrutinizes the mechanisms through which personal and collective memories are crafted, preserved and disseminated, particularly through the vehicle of storytelling. Through the story of the Abulheja family, Abulhawa illustrates how memory serves as a form of resistance against the erasure of Palestinian history and identity. In this paper, I endeavor to examine the intricate relationship between memory and narrative, elucidating how characters utilize storytelling and memory to reconstruct their past and mold their present identities. By drawing on a diverse array of theories concerning memory and narrative, I argue that memory is a pivotal instrument for the historical reconstruction of the past. Despite its socially constructed nature, memory allows for multiple interpretations and contributes to the identity formation of a particular group.*

**Keywords:** collective memory, mediation, narrative, subjectivity.

### **Introduction**

Memory is often defined in terms of its psychological cognitive domain which sets a disciplinary boundary to the concept of memory itself. Memory is not just a cognitive process but it carries certain social aspects which are deeply intertwined with cultural and collective experiences. According to Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, "memory is a symbolic representation of the past embedded in social action" (Confino & Fritzsche 2002,5). This social aspect of memory then emphasizes how individuals remember in relation to others and provide meaning to their subjective experiences. In a way, "memory is the past made present" (Terdiman 1993, 08) through which an individual vis a vis a group tries to assert a sense of self in the society. In modern context, memory has remained as a crucial aspect of nation building process. As a collective and individual phenomenon, it plays a crucial role in reshaping historical narratives and contributes to the creation of what Benedict Anderson termed as an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006, 04). In this context, memory serves as a repository of collective experiences and traditions, shaping a shared understanding of the past that binds individuals together into a cohesive national identity. By selectively remembering and forgetting certain events

and aspects of history, societies construct a narrative that reinforces their sense of belonging to a larger imagined community, thereby legitimizing the existence and authority of the nation-state. In this framework, our retelling of the past does affect our present condition. In both its individual and collective forms, memory is aptly aligned with identity as Barry Schwartz points out:

Recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present. (Schwartz 1982, 374)

Debates over memory may thus focus on the past of an individual or a group but in narrative, it is inherently social as stories are often crafted with an audience in mind. L.S Vygotsky's dialectical approach to development of the idea of narrative construction emphasizes the role of social interaction in shaping individual cognition and behavior. He argued that culture provides individuals with the "tools" necessary to become competent members of that culture. In this context, cultural tools influence how individuals structure and interpret their experiences. These tools provide individuals with the frameworks and conventions for telling stories, including the types of events that are considered important along with the ways in which events are connected and the moral or cultural values that are embedded within the narrative. In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the role of narrative in constructing, communicating and attributing meaning to memories. Scholars have emphasized on the poetics and meaning making attribute of narrative to unfold its broader cultural milieu. Mark Freeman further enhanced this idea of narrative construction as he notes, "narrative cognition is poetic — i.e., characterized by poesis, by the creation of meaning — through and through. We might in fact speak of the poetic dimension not only of the narrative construction of identity, as it takes place in autobiographies and the like, but of experience itself (Freeman 2001, 297). It appears that memory and narrative are not static entities but rather socially constructed phenomena, influenced by cultural, historical and individual factors. In this apparatus, I intend to examine the literary representation of the intricate interplay between memory and narrative construction. Literature serves as a powerful mode to explore the intertwined relationship between memory and narrative as authors skillfully employ a variety of literary devices to illuminate the subjective nature of memory and the dynamic nature of narrative interpretation. Through the depiction of characters' memories, authors not only challenge prevailing narratives but also interrogate historical certainties and showcase the diversity of multiple viewpoints within society. In doing so they engage in what Nicole Maurantonio termed as "politics of memory" (Maurantonio 2017, 2) since "a subjective

experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power. Simply stated, it is who wants whom to remember what, and why.” (Confino 1997, 1393) In this mode, I have taken Susan Abulhawa’s novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) as a primary literary text to analyze the above mentioned ideas, especially in terms of memory and mediation, subjectivity and different “sites of memory” in commemoration as Abulhawa intricately weaves a narrative that delves into the complexities of memory and its relationship with power dynamics. The novel vividly portrays the Palestinian experience of displacement, loss and resilience through the lens of the Abulheja family, offering a poignant exploration of memory as both subjective and collective experience. Notably, the Palestinian people have long been engaged in a struggle to reclaim their identity, particularly in the face of Israel’s settler colonial efforts to erase their history and deny their right of return. In this context, the act of remembering the past is a powerful form of resistance for the Palestinians. Through various acts of remembrance, such as commemorating key dates like Nakba Day, Palestinians assert their right to remember and mourn their losses. This act of remembering is thus not just about the past but it is something which is socially driven as it works as a tool for identity formation to them. Underling this ideological apparatus, Lena Jarryusi confirms, “the Palestinians may perhaps, however, be singular in their narrative awareness ... memory as resistance” (Jarryusi 2007, 116). As such, Susan Abulhawa too narrativized the literary representation of memories of different characters in her novel while situating it in the Palestinian context. In this case, it is important to analyze the poetics of memory and politics of representation as literary depiction of memories often problematize the “ethics of representation”. My objective in this paper is therefore to deconstruct the issues related to the socially distributed character of memory, and particularly the central role historical narratives play in the social construction of the past. Finally, I argue that memory is an indiscernible trope to the historical reconstruction of the past. Even though it mediates and remediates through different socio-cultural modes, it enables narratives to avail multiple interpretations. Through this process, narratives not only shape individual memories but also contribute to the formation of collective memory, influencing how societies interpret and remember their history.

### **(Re)Telling as Resistance and Existence**

In the context of Palestinian literature, there is a significant trend among writers to produce autobiographical and literary works that aim to retell the tragic history of the Palestinian people. At the heart of this trend lies a fundamental struggle against historical amnesia and the deliberate erasure of Palestinian history. For decades, Palestinian narratives have been marginalized, silenced or distorted, contributing to a broader narrative

hegemony that seeks to delegitimize the Palestinian experience which has been rightly pointed out by L.S Majaj as “memories, communal and personal, are foreclosed by the politics [...] are shaped by the agendas that continue to view Palestinians as a dispensable population, invisible on the world’s radar screen except as “terrorists” and obstacles to peace” (Majaj 2001,122). As such, Palestinian writers have turned to literature as a powerful tool of resistance, using personal and collective narratives to reclaim their history and assert their existence. In this apparatus, autobiographical works what we call “memory narratives” in particular, have played a crucial role. By recounting their personal experiences of displacement, dispossession and exile, Palestinian authors not only bear witness to historical injustices but also humanize the Palestinian struggle. In their stories, readers are confronted with the harsh realities of Palestinian life under occupation and ongoing sociopolitical turmoil that is often suppressed by mainstream discourse. Edward Said reflects the significance of this vogue by pointing out that Israeli narratives often misrepresent Palestinian history, thereby reinventing their own tradition. This misrepresentation underscores the urgency for Palestinians to reconstruct their own history via remembering while asserting their claims to land and identity:

Perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality. (Said 2000, 175)

In this apparatus, Susan Abulhawa masterfully weaves historical events into her novel, blurring the lines between history and fiction. Throughout the narrative of her *Mornings in Jenin*, she not only tells a story but also underscores the profound importance of history in shaping Palestinian collective memory. At the very beginning of the novel, she vividly portrays a historic Palestine, a land that Palestinians hold dear in their hearts for its idyllic beauty and peaceful existence:

IN A DISTANT TIME, before history ...a small village east of Haifa lived quietly on figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine. (Abulhawa 2010, 3)

As the narrative unfolds, readers are transported to a time when Palestine was not just a geographical location but a vibrant space of communities, cultures and traditions. The novel paints a picture of a land where olive groves stretched endlessly, where the scent of orange blossoms filled the air, and where the rhythms of daily life were marked by the traditions of the past. However, this idyllic portrayal is not devoid of the harsh realities of history. Abulhawa skillfully integrates significant historical events, such as the Nakba, the Six-Day War and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, into the fabric of her narrative. Through the lives of her characters, she

brings to life the struggles, the joys and the sorrows of a people caught in the tumultuous currents of history. In doing so, Abulhawa reminds us of the profound impact that history has on shaping individual and collective identities. She highlights the importance of remembering the past, not to dwell on grievances or seek vengeance, but to honor the memories of those who came before and to ensure that their stories are not forgotten. It is thus an attempt to restore the idea of a historic Palestine before the Nakba of 1948 that has long been denied by dominant hegemonic discourses. Ilan Pappé confirms this attempt as a strategy to counter cultural “memoricide” (Pappé 2006, 225), a term that he defines as a “system of erasure” practiced by Israel to distort the Palestinian history that asserts its existence in Palestine. In this sense, the opening paragraph of *Mornings in Jenin* sets a powerful tone by using metaphors to foreshadow the tragic events that will unfold in the narrative. The depiction of an idealized past serves as a poignant reminder of the history that has been ruptured by atrocity and the land that has been usurped by force. The mention of a “distant time” evokes a sense of nostalgia for a period when life was peaceful and harmonious, before the upheaval caused by conflict and displacement. The reference to “figs and olives”, trees that symbolize Palestinian presence and existence, reinforces the idea of a deep-rooted connection to the land that predates the Zionist claim of Palestine being “a land without a people for a people without a land”. This challenges the narrative of Palestinian absence or insignificance in the region while highlighting the rich history and culture that existed long before the establishment of Israel.

Many scholars and historians have highlighted the significance of the Nakba in the formation of Palestinian identity. The Nakba is not just a historical event but it is a lived experience that continues to impact Palestinians today. Remembering the Nakba is therefore seen as a way to preserve their cultural identity and assert their right to their homeland. In this context, Elias Sanbar argues that:

The contemporary history of the Palestinians turns on a key date: 1948. That year, a country and its people disappeared from both maps and dictionaries ... ‘The Palestinian people does not exist’ ... would be referred to by general, conveniently vague terms, as either ‘refugees’, or in the case of the small minority that had managed to escape generalized expulsion, ‘Israeli Arabs’. A long absence was beginning. (Sanbar 2001, 87)

In a way, by reclaiming the memory of the Nakba, Palestinians ensure that future generations understand the significance of this event and its impact on Palestinian identity. By publicly commemorating and remembering the Nakba, Palestinians affirm their collective identity and assert their political and moral claims to justice.

Memory, in this vogue becomes a volatile construct as it is not just a recollection of past events but also a reflection of how these events are remembered and interpreted what Nicole Maurantonio termed as “politics of memory”. It is also evident in *Mornings in Jenin* as the narrator retells the story of Haj Salem who has been displaced from the village of Ein Hod:

His story was everyone’s story, a single tale of dispossession, of being stripped to the bones of one’s humanity, of being dumped like rubbish into refugee camps unfit for rats. (Abulhawa 2010, 78)

Haj Salem’s story is portrayed as emblematic of the experiences of many Palestinians who were forcibly expelled from their homes and forced to live in refugee camps. His story becomes a symbol of dispossession and dehumanization, illustrating the harsh realities faced by Palestinians during and after the Nakba. It hence embodies the personal stories of dispossession and suffering that are central to the collective memory of Palestinians as “the private interests assume public significance that we call ‘society’” (Arendt 1958, 35). As a hoarder of memories, Haj Salem’s tales are not just personal anecdotes but reflections of the broader Palestinian narrative. His stories, like many Palestinian tales, are integral to the collective memory of Palestinian society which serves as a link to the past and a testament to the struggles and triumphs of the Palestinian people as “Haj Salem had seen it all. That’s what he used to tell us youngsters. It took many seasons to learn his story because he gave it in pieces” (Abulhawa 2010, 66). The character of Ammo Darweesh embodies the Palestinian experience of living under occupation, in refugee camps or in the diaspora, where the future is often seen as an unfinished process. Similarly, like many Palestinians, Ammo Darweesh too anticipates a bleak future within the refugee camp, viewing it as a place saturated with memories of displacement and the inability to reclaim their homeland as he said to Amal:

The future can’t breathe in a refugee camp, Amal. The air here is too dense for hope. You are being offered a chance to liberate the life that lies dormant in all of us. Take it. (Abulhawa 2010, 136)

The Jenin refugee camp thus serves as a transformative space for Amal that shapes her identity as a Palestinian refugee and leaving an indelible mark on her memory. The camp, a residue of the 1948 and 1967 wars, also represents a physical manifestation of Palestinian displacement and dispossession, making it difficult for Amal to escape its memories as she mourns: “growing up in a landscape of improvised dreams and abstract national longings, everything felt temporary to me.” (Abulhawa 2010, 156) Moreover, later on, the memories of the Jenin camp serve as a powerful centripetal force that shapes Amal’s identity and helps her navigate her sense



of belonging, especially in contrast to her experiences in the United States. The camp, with its collective memories of Palestinian struggle and resilience, provides Amal with a sense of rootedness and connection to her Palestinian identity. In this apparatus, the Jenin refugee camp represents what Pierre Nora has termed as a *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory. Nora notes:

*Lieux de mémoire* are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration...a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking a temporal continuity. (Nora 1986, 18-19)

Amal's experience then reflects the struggle of many immigrants and refugees who navigate the complexities of cultural identity in a new country while grappling with the memories of their past. The memories of the Jenin camp serve as a fundamental force that grounds Amal in her Palestinian identity, helping her resist assimilation into the American ethos. Initially, Amal's adoption of the Americanized name "Amy" symbolizes her attempt to assimilate into American culture and distance herself from her Palestinian roots. This temporary distancing, however, is challenged by her memories of the Jenin camp, where she was assigned her original name. The act of reclaiming her Palestinian name signifies a reconnection with her heritage and a rejection of assimilation:

Amy. Amal of the steadfast refugees and tragic beginnings was now Amy in the land of privilege and plenitude...I bought, I forever belonged to that Palestinian nation of the banished to no place, no man, no honor. My Arabness and Palestine's primal cries ... found myself searching books of history for accounts that matched the stories Haj Salem had told. (Abulhawa 2010, 179)

### **Memory, Mediation and Reconstruction of the Past**

The discourse surrounding memory and its interaction with reality, its role in mediating our perceptions and the outcomes it generates is intricate and multifaceted. It delves into fundamental inquiries concerning our cognition and interpretation of past events. This viewpoint necessitates a thorough investigation into the influence of memory and its ability to shape our comprehension of reality. In terms of its literary representation, the workings of memory transcend mere recollection of past events. It encompasses narrative intricacies and temporal nuances that imbue the past with meaning and significance. Authors engaging with memory often

focus on its discursive figurations, emphasizing its role as a form of representation that reflects conceptual and political contexts rather than a straightforward account of remembered events. It is then apt to argue that memory is not a simple process of recalling past events but is inherently mediated by various factors, including personal experiences, cultural narratives and societal influences. Ann Rigney confirms this when she argues that “the concept of mediation is crucial when describing how experience and archival traces are turned into shareable and shared representations. It is a complex matter, involving the interplay of various factors: materials and technologies (print, imaging, etc.) for inscribing and storing information; cultural forms and codes for shaping information into meaningful configurations; conduits and networks for circulating information and linking people through symbolic artefacts” (Rigney 2015, 69). Interestingly, when we approach literature, public discourses on the collective past are often influenced by stories that are not only mediated but also aestheticized. In this backdrop, the modes of literary representation of memory raises several questions— What techniques do novels or movies employ to shape their narratives and capture the attention and emotions of their audience? How do these narratives leverage the specific characteristics of their chosen medium to portray collective memory? Abulhawa’s novel *Mornings in Jenin* in this vogue engages with certain “models of remembrance” (Rigney 2015, 23) through which the act of remembering can trigger similar acts of remembrance in diverse situations and social contexts. The tropes used to express memories is often reused, serving as a means to retrieve historical artifacts from archives and bring them into current awareness. It thus reinforces Vygotsky’s dialectical approach to development of the idea of narrative construction that emphasizes the role of social interaction in shaping individual cognition and behavior.

To begin with, Susan Abulhawa vividly portrays the role of mediation in preserving Palestinian memory and identity through various mediums such as storytelling, cultural artifacts and different sites of memory throughout the narrative of her novel. These forms of mediation serve as vehicles for transmitting the Palestinian narrative and resisting attempts to erase or distort it. Storytelling is an indiscernible trope of the narrative through which memory mediates. The character of Yehya for instance, keeps the memory of Ein Hod alive through his vivid and compelling stories. He thus provides a link to the ancestral land and fosters a sense of pride in his family. One of the most striking examples of Yehya’s storytelling occurs early in the novel when he recounts the history of Ein Hod to his grandchildren. He describes the beauty of the village, its olive groves and its people, painting a vivid picture of a vibrant community. Despite the hardships faced by the family after being forced to leave Ein Hod, Yehya’s stories serve as a form of resistance, keeping the memory of the village alive in the minds of his descendants:

Those people don't know a damn thing about olives...If they had a sense of the land, then the land would compel in them a love for the olives. (Abulhawa 2010,46)

Yehya's stories also play a crucial role in fostering a deep connection to the ancestral land of Ein Hod. Despite being physically separated from their village, Yehya's family maintains a spiritual and emotional bond to the land through his stories. His grandchildren, in particular, are enraptured by his tales of Ein Hod, yearning to reclaim what was lost. In this context, the concerns of *Mornings in Jenin* thus resonate powerfully with what Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney have commented on the mediated nature of memory- "the memories that are shared within generations and across different generations are the product of public acts of remembrance using a variety of media. Stories, both oral and written, images, museums, monuments: these all work together in creating and sustaining 'sites of memory'" (Erll & Rigney 2006,111). In Abulhawa's novel, Yehya's stories serve as a form of cultural inheritance, passed down from one generation to the next. They are a means of connecting the past with the present, ensuring that the history and traditions of Ein Hod are not forgotten. In this way, Yehya's storytelling becomes a "site of memory" through which the collective memory of the village is preserved and transmitted.

Susan Abulhawa also represents the mediation of memory through cultural artifacts, such as photographs, artwork and personal belongings. These artifacts serve as tangible reminders of the past, preserving memories that might otherwise be lost or forgotten. Abulheja family's collection of photographs in the novel serves as a powerful tool for preserving their memories and documenting their history. These photographs not only provide a visual record of their experiences but also become a form of mediation, allowing the family to pass down their memories to future generations. Highlighting this idea of mediation of memory via photographs, Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits have commented that as material objects, photographs are powerful "vehicles of memory", comparable to other sites or *lieux* where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself". A photograph's capacity to freeze moments in time gives it a distinctive power as well as limitations not shared by texts whose meaning unfolds across time. A photograph's survival as material trace makes it subsequently possible for earlier moments to be made virtually present at later ones (Rigney & Smith 2023,16). In this apparatus, the photographs in the novel serve as mnemonic devices, triggering memories and forgotten past events of the family history. They become tangible links to the past which allows the characters to remember and connect with their ancestral heritage. Amal's reflection on standing inside al Aqsa during a family trip to Jerusalem in

1960, before Israel had occupied it, shows how the memory of a significant historical and religious site is preserved through personal experience and photographs:

The image of that massive pillar, which reached higher than my five-year-old mind could fathom...1960, before Israel had conquered it. Mama had kept a photograph taken...was our only family photograph...I intended to go on photographic record as the sole proprietor of him. I looked small and serious and when I found that picture after Mama died. (Abulhawa 2010, 139)

Seemingly, it demonstrates the role of photographs as “vehicles of memory” and their ability to preserve moments in time. In the Palestinian context however, these photographs can be “mobilized from private spheres to public realms – sacralized and charted as symbols of collective loss, thereby binding networks of Palestinians in exile” (Saad 2019,60). To be specific, the photograph of the narrator clutching his father’s leg in al Aqsa reinforces the personal nature of memory. The image symbolizes a desire to hold onto family and to preserve the memory of a time before occupation. It represents a longing for a lost homeland and a way of life that has been disrupted by conflict and displacement. On the other hand, it also connotes to the collective memory of the Palestinian people. The experience of visiting al Aqsa and other significant sites in Jerusalem before occupation is shared by many Palestinians who remember a time when they had access to these places without restrictions. These memories become part of the broader narrative of Palestinian history and identity, highlighting the deep connections Palestinians have to their land and heritage.

## Conclusion

Coming to the conclusion, it can be marked that Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* masterfully intertwines personal and collective memory to create a poignant narrative of Palestinian history and identity. Through the use of personal stories, family photographs and reflections on significant historical and religious sites, Abulhawa illuminates the complexity of Palestinian memory and its role in shaping individual and collective consciousness. In doing so she problematizes the concept of “ethics of memory” as the novel highlights the importance of memory in preserving personal and cultural heritage, especially in the face of displacement and occupation in the context of Palestine. Through the characters’ stories and memories, Abulhawa demonstrates how narratives serve as interpretative frameworks which guides one’s understating of the past and contributes to the construction of collective memory. Her narrativized memories of pre and post-1948 Palestine and the experiences of displacement and occupation serve as a form of resistance against the erasure of Palestinian history. The novel suggests that memory is not just a personal experience but is also deeply embedded in social

and cultural contexts. It is an indiscernible trope to the historical reconstruction of the past via different modes such as mediation, resistance or cultural representation.

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## From Plantations to Urban Centres: Exploring Occupational Transitions among Tea Tribes in response to Modernization

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### Abstract

*This study delves into the dynamics of occupational mobility within tea garden communities, focusing on intergenerational transitions and the impact of modernization factors. Utilizing a quantitative research design, the study employs stratified random sampling to investigate intergenerational mobility among diverse tea estates and adjacent basti areas. Data collection involves a household survey with a structured questionnaire covering parameters such as income, education, occupation, and proximity to urban centers. Descriptive and inferential statistics are utilized for data analysis. The probability models highlight the influence of proximity to urban centres on intergenerational mobility, indicating greater diversification opportunities for individuals residing closer to urban areas. Overall, the findings underscore the complex interplay between parental occupation, geographic location, and educational attainment in shaping occupational trajectories.*

### Keywords

occupational mobility, intergenerational transitions, modernization factors, tea garden communities

### Introduction: Mobility, as a shift from the current state of occupational suffice

Occupational mobility or 'transitions' is a shift in the source of livelihood of people whether they are living in an urban areas or a rural space (Reddy and Swaminathan 2014, 95). Occupational mobility is considered crucial because societies fixated by some stereotypical positions taken forth from parents (Bourdieu, Ferrie, and Kesztenbaum 2006, 5), hinders opportunities for innovation and personal fulfillment, both at individual and broader collective levels. This concept has amassed significant heed universally across various nations (Azam 2015, 1389). The examination of 'intergenerational advantage' has garnered significant attention and is a matter of fundamental concern in sociology (Ganzeboom, Treiman and Ultee 1991, 278), likely due to its association to wider notions of even-handed opportunity and societal inclusiveness (Miller and Volker

1985, cited in Mishra, Upadhyay and Sarma 2014, 113). Typically, this study involves analyzing simple two-dimensional arrays where categories of 'occupation of father' are compared to those of his son (Matras 1960, 167). There are varied classifications of occupational mobility, such as 'intersectoral', intra-sectoral, lateral and upward (Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2014, 126-127). Education plays a prominent role in determining occupational mobility (Duncan and Hodge 1963, 664), while independence and skill development are key components in understanding flexibility or progression (Hout 1984, 1379). An increase in the degree of education is itself a protector of 'downward mobility' (Minello and Blossfeld 2014, p 81). Intricate family bonds act as an important indicator to progression or mobility (Litwak 1960, 386), and the formation of 'human capital' is closely linked to 'occupation' and 'mobility', which in turn affects wage inequality (Kambourov and Manovskii 2009, 3). Social scientists operationalize mobility by examining the degree and structure of the association between the social and financial status of parents and that of their children, where a stronger association indicates lower levels of mobility (Torche 2015, 37-38).

'Occupational Labour Mobility' refers to the degree to which working person can transition between employment endeavors to secure better opportunities. Occupation primarily shapes an individual's social mobility trajectory (Sabirianova 2000, 4). Over time, societal shifts and evolving perspectives have led to both upgrades and downgrades in various occupations. These changes in the structure of occupation have also influenced the trends and patterns of mobility over the course of generations (Maity and Buragohain 2022, 244). When compared intergenerational occupational mobility across four continents Argentina (1860-1895), Britain (1851-1881), Norway (1865-1900), United States (1850-1880), it was observed that Argentina and United States had increase in occupational flexibility than countries like Britain and Norway (Pérez 2019, 391). In countries like Africa and India, the share of the farmers whose son's end up being farmers are 71 percent for Uganda and 43.25 per cent for India, however if we see the countries of west like United States and U.K the share is much less of 20.9 percent which derives us to the statement that children of parents remaining in unskilled occupations are more likely to stay in the same occupation mostly in the underdeveloped or developing countries (Motiram and Singh 2012, 18). In terms of social groups in India, ST/SC experienced higher mobility in 1965-65 to compare to higher caste when in 1945-65 birth cohort (Azam 2013, 1390). In another study on Intergenerational occupational mobility of undivided Sonitpur district, Assam, (Maity and Buragohain 2022, 370) observed that about 64 per cent has tendency to work outside the tea estates as because the current income does not fulfill the needs of their family.



In a study conducted by **(Raj 2013, 468)** titled "Economic Crisis and Neobondage in a South Indian Plantation Belt," he explores the subsistence economy of workers amidst a crisis in the South Indian plantation industry. During this crisis, workers' economic activities fluctuated between plantation labor, work outside the plantations, involvement with money lenders, and limited engagement with self-help groups. The crisis exposed plantation workers to opportunities outside their insular plantation environment, particularly in seeking alternative manual labor opportunities. Many workers began commuting from plantations to nearby towns and semi-urban areas for seeking employment. A society with high mobility stands to potentially experience faster growth by effectively harnessing the talents of its populace **(Weil 2009, 432 cited in Motiram and Singh 2012, 2)**.

In modern history, the educated and progressive often seek employment opportunities elsewhere, while in American history, driven individuals colonized the New World. However, in the modern history of Assam, an inert and uneducated populace migrated without realizing they would lose their former identities and become disconnected from their past **(Bose 1989, 122)**. The historical labor mobility or migration of laborers from the colonial period until Independence significantly altered the dynamics of tea tribe laborers **(Sarkar 2019, 28)**. In a study by **(Wolf 2002, 51)** tea workers recent migration showcases the stories that despite end of colonialism and indentured labour these people migrated from similar regions to Assam in search of occupational stability. This led to the emergence of a distinct subgroup of laborers with different characteristics, contributing to the region's development and growth beyond the confines of tea gardens. The diversification of occupations among adults from households of tea garden workers and former tea garden laborers sheds light on the varying significance of different sources of livelihood **(Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2011, 87)**. Initially, the distinction between households of current and former tea garden laborers appears to have little analytical importance when analyzing livelihood sources and employment. While a significant portion of adults from tea garden laborer households seek and secure work within the gardens **(Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2014, 120)**, many of them also rely on various other sources for their livelihood while residing within the tea garden premises. Similarly, those who have abandoned the gardens for various reasons have not untied relationship with the gardens **((Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2014, 120)** . There is a notable concentration of occupations within the tea gardens, although some degree of occupational diversification is observed among laborer households. Additionally, within the tea gardens, there is minimal representation of labor household members in higher-level positions such as executive, clerical, and

supervisory positions. Opportunities for upward progression are restricted within the tea gardens (**Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2014, 121-122**). Thus the current study focuses on assessing the intergenerational mobility in terms of occupation among tea tribes. The study also helps analyzing the impact of modernization parameters on the occupational diversification of tea tribe community.

## Methodology

For the current study a quantitative research design has been undertaken to dive into the understanding of the intergenerational occupational mobility within the tea tribes in the study area. A stratified random sampling has been adopted to showcase the intergenerational mobility among diverse tea estates and their adjacent *basti* areas by considering factors such as size and geographical location in the study. A *basti* (village settlement) is a surplus land provided by the managements to the time expired labourers (**Sharma 2009, 86**). To obtain the primary data a household survey is conducted with a structured questionnaire covering all the parameters like income, education, occupation, proximity of the study area. From all the respondents' voluntary participation and consent are taken to administer the survey. To protect the respondent confidentiality ethical grounds are given importance. Data analysis includes descriptive and inferential statistics which helps in comprehending the relationship between occupational mobility and socioeconomic and modernization parameters like education and nearness to urban centre.

## Results: Intergenerational mobility among tea tribes living within and outside the confines of tea estates

Social scientists, especially sociologists, have maintained a significant interest in intergenerational occupational mobility over time. In sociological discourse, this phenomenon is frequently denoted by the term "social mobility" (**Xie and Killewald 2013, 2003**). Social mobility is defined as the shift in terms of income, wealth and occupation from their former generations (**Beller and Hout 2006, 20**). In studies of social mobility; occupation is regarded as a dependable indicator of 'social echelon', 'income', and 'living caliber. Social mobility can be seen as having two parts: intra-generational mobility, which refers to an individual's movement up or down the economic scale during their span of existence, and intergenerational mobility, which refers to a child's progress compared to their parents over time (**Iversen, Krishna, and Sen 2017, 108**). Continuity of employment plays a role in shaping occupational mobility (**DeJong, Brawer, and Robin 1971, 1034**). A low level of 'Intergenerational Occupational Mobility' suggests that the pros and cons associated with one generation's occupational status are transmitted to posterity (**Buragohain 2018, 365**). In developing nations

overall, as well as within specific ethnic communities within those nations, intergenerational mobility regarding both education and occupation tends to be lower. What is concerning about social mobility is that the economic growth of an individual is indirectly proportional to their family history. To analyze the degree of its association betwixt the level of economic scale amid generations a correlation is performed in between the parents and their children **(Björklund and Jäntti 1999, 4)**. Additionally, being deprived of opportunities for skill development due to limited income leaves individuals with less human capital, thus diminishing the earning potential of their children in the next generation **(Majumder 2010, 464)**.

To investigate intergenerational occupational mobility, data collection necessitated information on two key variables: the occupation of the respondent and the occupation of their father **(DeJong, Brawer, and Robin 1971, 1035)**. As our focus is on intergenerational studies, we define an individual based on both their familial lineage (a series of entities linked by family bonds) and the generational kingship they are part of. Each family comprises only one parent and one child. This simplification enables a straightforward depiction of intergenerational interactions within each lineage **(Chusseau, Hellier, and Ben-Halima 2013, 6)**. Intergenerational occupational diversification can be examined using transition matrices. Each element in these matrices indicates the proportion of sons or daughters in various occupations relative to the overall number of children whose parents are in the same work pursuits **(Buragohain 2018, 367)**. Horizontal mobility is present across various occupations, whereas vertical mobility is only noticeable when individuals transition from daily wage labor to becoming business owners within the garden **(Buragohain 2018, 370)**. The mobility of tea garden workers can be analyzed from two perspectives: firstly, at the intersectoral level, which examines the degree to which individuals associated with tea gardens, including laborers and their family members, have pursued occupations the tea garden realm. Secondly, within the tea sector itself, the focus is on the movement of workers or their offspring from one employment stage to another, particularly towards more elevated positions. This two-tiered approach, as outlined by **(Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2014, 126-127)** provides a comprehensive framework for understanding occupational mobility within tea garden communities, encompassing both transitions across different sectors within the tea industry.

Thus, we can define Inter-generational Matrix as follows-

$$a_{ij} = \frac{\sum O_{ij}}{\sum O_j}$$

The formula  $a_{ij} = \frac{\sum O_{ij}}{\sum O_j}$  represents the transitional probabilities from parents' occupation  $j$  to their sons' or daughters' occupation  $i$ . In simpler terms, it calculates the likelihood of a child being in occupation  $i$  given that their parent was in occupation  $j$ .

The numerator  $\sum O_{ij}$  represents the overall number of workers who pursue occupation  $i$  whose parents were in occupation  $j$ , while the denominator  $\sum O_j$  represents the total number of workers whose parents were in occupation  $j$ . The diagonal elements  $a_{ij}$  indicate the ratio of workers who have inherited the same occupation as their parents. Therefore,  $1 - a_{ij=j}$  serves as an indicator of persistence of occupation within the offspring of parents (Mishra, Upadhyay, and Sarma 2014, 126).

The analysis delves into a table outlining the probabilities of children pursuing various occupations in relation to their parents. For the unskilled workers the probability of child occupation for unskilled workers is becoming unskilled workers (28 per cent), eventually followed by shop owner or farm owner (36 per cent), semi skilled workers (18.6 per cent). Therefore this showcases a occupational persistence within the similar occupations with some potential for upward mobility. Those children who are working as semi skilled workers have the highest probability (34.6 per cent) of becoming skilled workers themselves, followed by semi skilled workers (23 per cent) and unskilled workers (7.6 per cent). This signifies a possibility of upward mobility from semi skilled to skilled occupations. High probability is observed among the skilled workers children of holding the same occupation as their parents with the semi skilled worker being the second most probability (23 per cent). This indicates a strong mobility within the sectors of skilled and semi skilled sector. Apart from this those people having their own shop has the likelihood (34 per cent) of becoming skilled workers (38.4 per cent), pursued by semi skilled workers (15.3 per cent) and unskilled workers (23 per cent). This symbolizes for a downward mobility from a self making startup to working under some conditions. Moreover those children whose parents are working as teachers or in some other profession want their children to pursue the same thus indicate a sign of occupational continuity within the same sphere. On the other hand those children of unskilled parents are mostly following their parents footsteps with some proportion of them entering into semi skilled or opening their own shops. Moreover the children of semi skilled workers demonstrate a significant likelihood

of upward mobility with a substantial proportion entering skilled occupations. In terms of children of shop owners or farm owners there is likelihood of upward and downward mobility and which presents a diverse occupational trajectories. Although there is a high indication of entering skilled occupation, there is also an increasing chance of transitioning into unskilled or semi skilled roles. Thus the analysis showcases how the parental occupation and the children's occupation is intricately related with the primary focus on analyzing the occupational flexibility, where upward or downward within these sectors.

From the analysis of the *basti* area population and their mobility into different sectors what comes to the notice is that the *basti* area population has a diverse pattern of occupation influenced by the parental occupation. An upward mobility is also observed with combined 9.43 per cent of the people shifting to semi skilled and skilled occupations. Conversely those offspring's whose parents are engaged in semi skilled works are seen to have a more balanced distribution with 7.14 per cent entering semi skilled positions and 8.33 per cent advancing to skilled occupations. It is also observed that the offspring of the skilled labourers are generally observed sharing the responsibility of family by opting for similar skilled workers. In terms of those who have opened a shops or having their own farms, their next generation are seen involving themselves in more semi professional work, showcasing upward and also downward mobility.

A matrix has been created which provides an insightful understanding of the mobility patterns within a specific community with the counts depicting the number of children in different occupational categories with respective to their parent's occupation. The children of the unskilled workers have likelihood for working in the unskilled profession (36 per cent) for the stability of income if working as a permanent worker. However there are also probabilities for shifting into semi skilled (13.5 per cent) or skilled (5 per cent) positions, accentuating limited opportunities for upward mobility in this group.

Children of semi-skilled workers display a diverse range of probabilities, with notable chances of entering skilled labor roles (25 per cent) and unskilled labor roles (37.5 per cent). Offspring of skilled workers have equal probabilities of entering skilled labor roles (33 per cent) and unskilled labor roles (33 per cent), indicating a balanced distribution within this category. Children of shop owners or farm owners have a single probability,

with a 100 per cent likelihood of entering skilled labor roles. This suggests a strong tendency for occupational continuity within entrepreneurial contexts. Children of professional parents are guaranteed (100 per cent) to enter the professional category, indicating a distinct pattern of occupational continuity within this sphere. Those workers who work in semi skilled occupations the offspring of them opt for moving into different sectors and not following the lead of their parents. This is observed in both skilled (25 per cent) and unskilled (37.5 per cent) occupations. Overall the analysis underscores the intricate interplay between the occupation of parents and the children, identifying how the diverse socioeconomic dynamics shape the occupational flexibility within a community.

The response variable in the logistic regression model created for within the tea estate is dichotomous which signifies that it has only two outcomes. In the outcome variable if the child follows the same occupation as their parents it is coded as “1” for Yes and “0” for No who does not follow the same occupation. Moreover the logistic regression model used highlights a significant association between proximity to the urban centres and inters generational occupational mobility. The likelihood of intergenerational occupational mobility decreases as one moves away from the urban centre which is explained by the coefficient of predictor variable Prox\_uc (Proximity to urban centre). The finding is also statistically substantial as depicted by the p value of 0.000 suggesting that Prox\_uc significantly influences the outcome variable int\_gen\_mob(intergenerational occupational mobility).The models goodness of fit metrics such as Cox and Snell R square indicates that a considerable ratio of the variance in the intergenerational mobility is explained by the model. Moreover the classification table also indicates that the models performance ability in predicting the outcome is with a total accuracy of 80 per cent. The findings therefore signifies the prominence of geographic proximity as a significance variable of social mobility, pin pointing the challenges individuals face in achieving upward mobility when residing further from the urban centers.

The logistic regression model of the tea tribes living in the *basti* area presents an analysis of factors influencing occupational mobility within tea garden communities. The value 111.707 reflects the model’s alignment with the data. Apart from it the R square value which is 0.298 indicates that about 29.8 portion of the spread in the intergenerational occupational mobility is elaborated by the model. In the same manner the Nagelkerke R

Square of 0.412 indicates that about 41.2 per cent of the variance in occupational mobility is taken into account by the model. For those cases where the outcome values are Yes (indicating inter sector mobility) the model correctly predicts 98.7 percent of them. The overall percentage of predictions across all cases is 75.8 per cent. The coefficient value of 2.692 indicates that proximity to urban centre has a prominent effect on the intersectoral occupational mobility. Moreover as the proximity to urban centre increases the odds of intersectoral mobility significantly increases ( $\text{Exp (B)}=14.759, p<0.001$ ). The coefficient of 0.028 also indicates that education has an insignificant impact on intersectoral mobility ( $p=0.914$ ). Therefore the overall analysis signifies that proximity as a modernization variable has an important impact in determining the intergenerational occupational mobility.

## Conclusion

The impact of variables like education and proximity to urban centre within and outside the tea garden helps in obtaining in-depth insights into the transition of occupational pattern between generations. The logistic regression models helps in comprehending the impact of relationships between proximity to urban centre and occupational mobility emphasizing on the concepts like geographic location and its impact on transition of occupation over the course of generations. Those people living in closer vicinity to the urban centers are seen to have more occupational diversification i.e. more mobility in terms of occupation compared to others. This accentuates the prominent role of geographic proximity as a variable influencing the socioeconomic mobility with urban areas contributing greater opportunities for diversified occupation. The logistic model highlights a good predictive accuracy with higher percentage of predictions for intergenerational occupational mobility. Thus the above findings help in comprehending the different dimension of occupational mobility within and outside the tea gardens. Further research will help in understanding the underlying factors behind these mobility patterns.

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## On Women's Question: A Revisit of Ambedkar's Theorization on Caste, Gender and Democracy

Jenisha Singh & Prabudh Singh

### Abstract

*The ideas of democracy and fraternity hold a central place in Ambedkar's discussions on women's issues. It can be argued that his idea of fraternity as a brotherhood of caste groups is notably exclusive to women in its phallogocentric terminology. This leads to two important questions: Where do women stand in Ambedkar's vision of democracy? Does he shape his idea of a fraternal India within this exclusivity, or does he offer an alternative perspective? This paper explores these questions by closely examining Ambedkar's views on women's issues as presented in his writings.*

### Keywords

Ambedkar, Caste, Democracy, Fraternity, Gender, Phallogocentrism

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### Introduction: On the Origin and the Intersections of Caste and Gender

Ambedkar's involvement with the women's question dates back to 1916, with the presentation of his academic paper *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* at the University of Columbia. This influential work delves into the intricate mechanisms, historical genesis, and evolutionary development of the caste system while simultaneously exploring the nuanced relationship between caste and gender. According to his study, the practice of endogamy, which is the custom of marrying within a specific social group, has played a crucial role in sustaining the structure of the caste system, effectively creating an 'enclosed class system' within society. Caste, as explained by Ambedkar, is a closed social class system established by the Brahmins through the practice of endogamy. Endogamy works by maintaining equality between marriageable individuals within the caste, ensuring that surplus men and women can find suitable matches within their own social group. The balance between surplus men and women was maintained through the practice of disposing of surplus women through customs such as Sati,

enforced widowhood, or child marriage. Meanwhile, surplus men were valued for their labour contributions and were retained by marrying them to individuals from a non-marriage age group (Ambedkar 1979b, 13).

Ambedkar provides a comprehensive analysis of the origin and mechanism of the caste system, emphasizing three significant ideas that shed light on its complex nature and historical development. First, he argues that the concept of caste was established by the Brahmins, as endogamy, the practice of marrying within a specific social group, was a unique characteristic of their social interactions. Second, the Brahmins' worldview solidified with specific characteristics only after the arrival of the law-giver Manu. Manu's influence was significant as he formalized and legalized the caste hierarchies, establishing them as a fundamental social system. Lastly, the widespread imitation of social customs from the Brahmin class resulted in the emergence of numerous castes and sub-castes, leading to a significant diversification within the social structure (Ambedkar 1979b, 18).

In Ambedkar's analysis of the relationship between caste and the subjugation of women, he highlights two crucial concepts. Firstly, he emphasizes the internal preservation and perpetuation of caste within the Hindu society, and secondly, he underscores the hegemonic patriarchal control over women's sexuality. Consequently, the traditional perception of society often associates women with the preservation and perpetuation of caste systems. At the core of a woman's identity lies the societal expectation of upholding purity, which is closely linked to her body. In a society structured by caste, the woman thus serves as the primary channel through which caste dynamics are continually reinforced and perpetuated (Chakravarti 1993, 582).

### **The Status of Women: Brahmins, Buddha, and Manu**

In his work *The Woman and the Counter-Revolution*, Ambedkar delves into the intricate relationship between caste and gender dynamics. His analysis revolves around the pivotal concepts of Brahmanism, Manu, and Buddhism, through which he constructs a framework for discussing the liberation of women. Studying the position of women in a pre-Manu Brahmin society, Ambedkar points out that women were entitled to *upanayana*, the sacred thread ceremony, and the knowledge of the Vedas, as evidenced in the Atharva Veda. This insight challenges the commonly held belief that women were excluded from Vedic education and certain rituals in ancient Indian society. The ancient texts, including Panini's *Ashtadhyay* and Patanjali's *Maha Bhashya*, provide evidence that women not only attended *gurukul* (college) but also excelled in their studies, becoming experts in Mimamsa, demonstrating that women in ancient times were

actively involved in scholarly pursuits and were able to achieve expertise in their chosen fields of study (Ambedkar 1979e, 432).

In the period before the establishment of Manu's laws, women in India were making significant strides in attaining high levels of academic achievement and educational opportunities. The increased visibility of women in the public realm of a Brahmanical society can be attributed primarily to the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism's emphasis on the equality of all beings and its inclusion of women in religious practices and teachings challenged the traditional patriarchal norms of Brahmanical society, leading to a shift in the status and visibility of women. Ambedkar's analysis suggests that Brahmanism strategically integrated certain aspects of Buddhism, particularly those related to the status of women, in order to sustain its influence among the broader population. Buddhism arose as a direct response to the principles of Brahmanism. From its inception and throughout its evolution, Buddhism sought to reform the Brahminic society by promoting the principles of equality and brotherhood. During the period of Buddhism, women from all social classes were conferred a higher status in a society that was progressing quickly. Buddha, recognizing the spiritual capabilities of women, allowed them to participate in the *parivrajaka*, or the life of a female ascetic (Ambedkar 1979c, 193-195).

During the revival of Brahmanism under the rule of King Pushyamitra and Manu, Buddhism gradually waned in its impact on the collective consciousness of the people. This period marked a shift in religious and philosophical influence within the region. The Varna system, which was challenged by Buddha, eventually gave way to a more rigid caste system in ancient India. This new system enforced strict divisions of labour and marriage within different castes, known as endogamy. Manusmriti transpired to be the gospel of counter-revolution against Buddhism, redefining the societal roles of women (Ambedkar 1979e, 429-432).

Before the time of Buddha, the concept of a *pativrata* woman, characterized by utmost submission and reverence towards her husband, existed only as a theoretical idea among the Brahmins. However, it was Manu who transformed this concept into a concrete set of rules, possibly as a defence mechanism against potential challenges to Brahmanism, similar to how Buddha had done. With the introduction of Manusmriti, women were unjustly deprived of the opportunity to attain spiritual or any form of knowledge. Manu's perspective unjustly categorized women as lacking in spiritual potential, giving rise to a system that denied them access to spiritual knowledge and education in any form (Ambedkar 1979e, 429-432).

The denial of access to spiritual knowledge was not limited to just the Shudras; women from all caste groups were also excluded. This exclusion played a crucial role in establishing knowledge as a form of power,

allowing the Brahmins, who were the disseminators of knowledge, to maintain a dominant position within the caste-gender hierarchy. This systematic exclusion served to perpetuate the hegemonic control of certain groups over others, and subsequently reinforced existing power structures within the society. Along with the Shudras, the womenfolk from all caste groups were also denied the privilege of accessing spiritual knowledge. This exclusion was necessary to construct knowledge as power through which the disseminators of knowledge, Brahmins, would have a hegemonic position in the caste-gender nexus. The exclusion of women from the spheres of knowledge and truth, confining them instead to the domains of tradition and superstition, resulted in their disempowerment. This relegation rendered women unable to resist and led to their transformation into compliant, obedient subjects, perpetuating the systemic and symbolic violence of the existing caste system.

The role of knowledge then in the liberation of women is crucial. During the Buddhist era, there was an emphasis on the accessibility of knowledge, which led to progress and the cultivation of respect and reverence towards others. In contrast, Brahmanical society focused on the organized exploitation of women and lower castes. The erasure of Buddha's teachings, as identified by Ambedkar, thus poses a significant threat to the modern Indian consciousness.

### **Ambedkar's Challenge to Caste and Gender Subjugation vis-à-vis Buddhism and its Democratic Fraternal Ethos**

For Ambedkar, Buddha epitomized democracy and fervently advocated for liberty, equality, and fraternity. He held the belief that by embracing Buddhism, women could embrace the principles of dignity and break free from their traditional roles as perpetuators of the caste system. In Buddhism, Ambedkar recognized the significance of fraternity as a powerful force for dismantling caste and gender oppression. He believed that the principle of fraternity was essential for establishing a society that is both egalitarian and autonomous. According to him, the presence of fraternity in Buddhism provided a strong foundation for building a more just and inclusive social order.

The foundational principle of democracy is rooted in the concept of fraternity, which Ambedkar believed to be a critical means of eradicating the caste system and fostering an ideal society characterized by social intermingling and exchange, known as 'social endosmosis' (Ambedkar 1979a, 57). Democracy, according to his perspective, is fundamentally a way of life that involves people living together as a community, and he identifies a sense of shared identity in the teachings of Buddha. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar emphasizes that the *sangha*, or the fraternity of Buddhist monks, established by Buddha was

truly inclusive. There were no restrictions based on caste, gender, or social status within the sangha. All individuals were considered equal, and the rank within the sangha was determined by one's merit and contributions rather than by birth or social standing. This egalitarian approach underscored the fundamental principles of equality and meritocracy within the Buddhist community. Buddhism promoted the idea of creating a society that was open and diverse, encouraging a feeling of unity among people from all caste backgrounds, in opposition to the rigid social structure of Brahmanism (Ambedkar 1979c, 416). As a result, Buddha's teachings became a direct inspiration for Ambedkar when he was drafting the constitution for a democratic India.

Ambedkar believed that democracy and religion were closely intertwined, as he viewed religion as essential for upholding a moral code in society. He emphasized the importance of religion in providing a framework for ethical behaviour and societal harmony within a democratic system (Omvedt 2003, 8). A new, moral and rationalistic religion or Dhamma was necessary to dismantle the oppressive structures of Brahmanical Hinduism that marginalized the untouchables and women. He believed that religion would not disappear with modernity, but rather a modern and rational religion would emerge to provide a moral foundation for democratic values.

### **Interrogating Phallogocentrism in Ambedkar's Notion of Democracy and Fraternity**

'The sacred word of the new age – *Fraternity*, the woman can spell it, but does not yet know how to read it.', Jules Michelet writes in *Le peuple* (qtd. in Derrida 2005, 228).

In the time following Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's influence, we have observed a contrast between the overarching ideals of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, and the persistent presence of gender-based disparities. Despite the increasing participation of women in public and political spheres, the persistent inconsistency remains a concerning issue. Despite the growing representation of women in public and political arenas, the enduring presence of gender inequality remains a significant concern. The existing inequality may be attributed to structural imbalances that are ingrained in the operations of democratic systems and the principle of fraternity. According to Derrida, the tradition of democracy contains a gendered idiosyncrasy that reveals the patriarchal nature of the concept of fraternity. This exposes how women are rendered invisible within the socio-political hierarchy (Derrida 2005, 240). Derrida's analysis sheds light on the inherent gender biases within the democratic tradition, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and equitable societal structure. While fraternity, in its most basic sense, refers to an attitude of respect and gratitude towards a fellow citizen, capable of turning a self-centred and arrogant focus on individual

freedom into a consideration for the liberation of the community as a whole. It is a concept that is not only inclusive but also holds great significance for women and men alike.

Ambedkar's vision of anti-caste resistance was intricately intertwined with the utilization of kinship-based caste networks and the subsequent establishment of a sense of solidarity among the oppressed castes. Within the framework of caste, which is inherently based on patriarchal relations, the concept of solidarity among the oppressed can be seen as having a foundation within the patriarchal structure. This is due to the fact that caste dynamics are deeply rooted in traditional family and kinship structures, which in turn influence the formation of alliances and networks among the oppressed castes.

Ambedkar faced criticism for his views on the Buddhist fraternal contract during his time. An article in Eve's Weekly magazine specifically criticized Buddha for the perceived decline in the status of women due to his patriarchal nature, particularly emphasizing the creation of separate sanghas for male and female monks. In response to the criticism, Ambedkar wrote and published a book titled *The Rise and Fall of Hindu Woman: Who was Responsible for it?* where he passionately defended Buddha by highlighting Buddha's advocacy for celibacy as the ideal path to attain the objectives of the Dhamma. In the said book, Ambedkar delves into the complex societal and cultural factors that influenced the status of women in Hindu society and presents Buddha's teachings as a positive force for women's rights and empowerment. Explaining the creation of a separate male and female sangha, Ambedkar argued that,

[Buddha] was afraid that in a confraternity of men and women *Parivrajakas* the rule of celibacy would be completely lost. While therefore admitting women, he thought, it was necessary to use his own words, a dyke between them by creating two separate organisations (Ambedkar 1979d, 115).

Timothy Loftus, echoing Ambedkar's arguments in his analysis, emphasizes that the decision to segregate the two distinct sanghas was primarily a pragmatic measure to uphold celibacy. Loftus further contends that the perception of women as impure or defiling objects was a later imposition by male monastics, rather than an original teaching. This interpolation was deemed necessary to preserve male celibacy (Loftus 2021, 276).

The issue with such formulations arises from the fact that, despite the Buddhist goal of transcending gender, caste, and sexuality, female sexuality is often perceived as a significant impediment to achieving this transcendence. This discrepancy raises questions about the underlying beliefs and societal attitudes that contribute to this view within the context of Buddhist philosophy and practice. According to Buddhist beliefs, celibacy holds a significant role in male enlightenment. Embracing sexual abstinence is considered



essential for a Bhikku to embody true masculinity. However, the perspective on celibacy differs for a Bhikkuni. Instead of symbolizing the realization of her womanhood, celibacy is viewed as a practice that distances her from her femininity and regulates her sexuality, mainly due to her reproductive nature.

The instructions governing the relationship between the *Bhikkus* (monks) and the *Bhikkunis* (nuns) emphasize a dynamic akin to that of a mother-son or sister-brother. However, these instructions do not establish similar bonds for the women, leaving them without clear relational guidelines. This lack of gender parity in the instructions hinders the development of strong community bonds, even among individuals of the same gender within the Buddhist community. The way Buddha viewed the female body as a potential challenge to the commitment to celibacy creates a link between Hinduism, which can be seen as a hierarchical form of sexual violence, and Buddhism, which can be viewed as a more democratic form of sexual surveillance. As a result, women have been and will continue to be victims of patriarchal influence in the formation of caste structures.

Buddhism, as celebrated by Ambedkar as being a golden age for women, is characterized by a noticeable lack of representation of women as Bhikkunis leading the Dhamma, raising questions about gender equality within the Buddhist tradition and the historical role of women in Buddhism. The social history of Ambedkar's Buddha overlooks the presence of women, a theme that is also depicted in Hira Bansode's poem *Yashodhara*, where she writes:

He [Buddha] was moving towards a great splendour  
far from the place you lay/he went, he conquered, he shone  
while you listened to the songs of his triumph  
your womanliness must have wept  
but history does not talk about the great story of your sacrifice. (Bansode 2012)

In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Yashodhara is predominantly portrayed in her role within the royal family as a wife and a mother, with little focus on her journey as a Bhikkuni (Ambedkar 1979c, 165-168). This lack of representation of influential women figures perpetuates the construction of women's identities in relation to the dominant patriarchal narrative, primarily centred around the Buddha and his Bhikkus. Thus, a woman's identity is primarily framed in relation to her domestic role.

In his defence of Buddha's perception of women as 'the commodity Supreme because [...] she is of indispensable utility, or because through her *Bodhisattvas* and world rulers take birth', Ambedkar defines women within the restrictive role of (re)producer (Ambedkar 1979d, 118). By emphasizing the reproductive

capacity of the female body, Ambedkar replicates the Brahmanical gender norms. This emphasis on the reproductivity of women reinforces traditional societal expectations and roles, perpetuating the existing gender norms within the broader cultural and religious context.

Ambedkar's perspective on the role of women within the democratic framework of patriarchal power structures, particularly in relation to knowledge, is also susceptible to debate when he says,

Education is necessary for females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be. Mould their life in a virtuous way, for sons should be such as would make a mark in this world. (qtd. in Keer 1954, 104)

Further, inside the sangha, a Bhikkhuni primarily shares a pupil-teacher relationship with the Bhikkus. However, she is also viewed as a maternal figure or a sister, and it is only after assuming one of these roles that she becomes eligible for membership in the sangha. This association with familial roles underscores the traditional perception of women within the Buddhist community. It suggests that a woman's identity is often linked to her familial roles, and she faces challenges in establishing a distinct and independent identity outside of these traditional constructs. Ambedkar's conceptualization of democracy thus parallels a phallogocentric fraternity.

### **Rights and/or Domesticity: The Role for Women in Ambedkar's Politics**

Women have always been an integral part of Ambedkar's political praxis. Their participation has been significant and active in his fight against caste and gender oppression. Notably, women actively engaged in temple entry movements and the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 under his leadership. Moreover, they organized themselves under the All India Depressed Classes Mahila Federation in the 1940s, demonstrating their commitment to the cause of social justice and equality. Ambedkar delivered a compelling counsel to the Constituent Assembly, emphasizing the necessity of establishing a Uniform Civil Code through the Hindu Code Bill. The Bill specifically targeted several key areas, including:

- 1) The right to property of a deceased Hindu who has died intestate without making a will, extending this right to both male and female heirs.
- 2) The order of succession among the different heirs to the property of a deceased individual.
- 3) The law of maintenance, addressing the financial support and sustenance for dependents.

- 4) Marriage laws, aiming to reform and standardize marriage practices.
- 5) Divorce laws, seeking to establish clear and fair procedures for marital dissolution.
- 6) Adoption laws, outlining regulations for the legal process of adoption.
- 7) Minority and guardianship laws, addressing the rights and responsibilities of guardians in the upbringing of minors. (qtd. in Datta 2019, 29)

However, while advocating for these reforms, it is important to note that Ambedkar's focus was primarily on addressing and improving the status of women within the family and domestic sphere.

In the context of the Hindu Code Bill, Hindu women are consistently situated within the family structure, creating an enduring paradox in the political arena. In democratic practices, women are positioned as dependents rather than leaders within the family unit. According to Ambedkar, a woman's identity and existence are closely intertwined with familial ties and domestic life. Therefore, Ambedkar views a woman's role as ascriptive, defined by the inherent nature of being female. His concept of democracy is based on the ideal of a socially transcendent male, contrasting with the recurring role of women as symbols of domesticity.

## Conclusion

Ambedkar's critique of the Hindu tradition as regressive and oppressive towards women delves deeply into the historical injustices inflicted upon women by closely examining Hindu scriptural canons. Through his analysis, Ambedkar takes a compassionate stance towards the marginalized women of India, portraying them as a symbol of the inherent oppression and lack of freedom perpetuated by the caste system. This perspective sheds light on the systemic challenges faced by women within the broader context of social and religious structures in India.

The importance of considering women as the focal point of Ambedkar's theoretical framework is significant, not only in the context of feminist discourse but also in terms of their political implications. Women, as central figures, are consistently shaped by specific exclusionary mechanisms. Essentially, the socio-political construction of women evolves within particular exclusionary frameworks, irrespective of the emancipation it may promise. To initiate a feminist dialogue on Ambedkar's ideas and philosophy, it is

essential not only to explore Ambedkar's role in the emancipation of women but also to critically analyse his conceptualization of women in Indian society.

Ambedkar visualized a transformative vision for India, known as Prabuddha Bharat, aimed at addressing the unjust social structures that existed in opposition to Bahishkrit Bharat. This envisioned New India was to be characterized by the spirit of fraternity, a concept significantly lacking in traditional Hindu society. Despite these progressive ideals, the traditional gender norms still constrained women within this reimagined society. Ambedkar did introduce new ideas about women's rights within the context of Buddhist democracy, but his approach was limited by an essentialist framework.

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## Aesthetics of Protest: 'Shaheenbaghing' India

Lakshmi Sukumar and Smitha M

### Abstract

*Protest, a fundamental right in a democracy, is an act of disruption – a challenge to the status quo. But protest goes beyond mere dissidence; it is a performance, a carefully curated spectacle that utilises aesthetics to amplify its message and impact. The aesthetics of protest are not merely ornamentation; they are a deliberate communication strategy. Traditional modes of communication, like speeches or petitions, can be limited in their reach. Aesthetics, however, transcend language barriers and resonate with a wider audience. Powerful imagery, evocative symbols, and captivating performances can capture attention, spark emotional responses, and crystallise complex issues into readily digestible narratives. Two of the defining features of twenty-first century political developments across the globe are the strengthening of right-wing forces and the emergence of new patterns of protests and solidarities across different sections of society challenging the neoliberal forces. This paper intends to explore the reimagining of protest in India through the protest at Shaheen Bagh against the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that rocked the nation in 2019. The discussion will focus on the visual and digital methodologies used in this protest, making optimum use of hybrid spaces. The theoretical underpinnings of the aesthetics of protest, examining how visual elements, rhetorics, symbols, and performance combine to create a potent force for change would be analysed to decipher the visual embodiment of protest.*

**Keywords:** Visuality, Embodiment, Protest, Shaheen Bagh, CAA

## **Introduction**

The new millennium is marked by increasing disillusionment with neoliberalism's claims of social progress through an unregulated capitalist market. The receding of the state from its responsibilities towards the marginalised and vulnerable has resulted in the formation of a dystopian world of destitution and deprivation. As the world moves towards apparent forms of authoritarianism with the political parties also acting as linchpins of neoliberal structures, there is a larger realisation of the civil society of the need of citizen solidarities beyond the purview of institutionalised spaces. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'protest' as "the expression of social, political, or cultural dissent from a policy or a course of action, typically by means of a public demonstration; (also) an instance of this, a protest march, a public demonstration" (Hatuka 2018). The counterhegemonic consciousness engendered by social discontent gets channelised through different forms of protest, violent or non-violent. Unlike violent protests, peaceful protests act as a safety valve for the gradual release of citizens' discomfiture with the institutionalised regimes. In a world teeming with diverse voices, protest stands as a powerful tool for making those voices heard. It's a fundamental right, a necessary rumble in the tide of progress. Throughout history, protests have been the spark that ignited change, pushing back against injustice and demanding a more equitable world. At its core, protest is the public expression of dissent. It's a way for people to stand up and say "no" to policies they believe are wrong, or "enough" to situations they deem unacceptable. Protests come in a rich tapestry of forms, from silent vigils to passionate marches. They can be small gatherings or events that bring together thousands and enable the formation of "protest publics" that led the protest through the circulation of different aesthetic texts to bring forth emotional mobilisation even in distant places.

In this age of digital media and populist politics, we are witnessing a new turn in the design and performance of protest with possibilities ranging from large-scale protests to everyday forms of resistance, using mundane spaces and resources to construct media spectacles. The digital affordances have incited hashtag movements against diverse issues, from gendered violences to authoritarian geopolitics across the globe. Social media excels at spreading awareness and

mobilising large geographically dispersed groups. Online petitions and hashtags can garner vast support quickly. The virtual world also facilitates anonymous participation, though at times the anonymity could lead to a lesser sense of commitment due to an easy mode of protest through 'clickivism' and 'slackivism'. In spite of the reach of protests which are exclusively online, translating them into substantial policy changes would involve further struggle. Hybrid protests leverage the strengths of both online and offline activism. Social media fuels organisation, raises awareness, and mobilises geographically distant supporters. Street presence creates a powerful visual image and disrupts business as usual. A crowd of protestors on the streets is impossible to ignore. Offline protests create a powerful visual spectacle that grabs public attention and disrupts the status quo. This can force authorities to acknowledge the issue and potentially concede to demands. Hybrid protests are fluid and adapt to evolving situations. Organisers can quickly adjust tactics based on real-time developments and counter-measures. A crowd of protestors on the streets is impossible to ignore. Offline protests create a powerful visual spectacle that grabs public attention and disrupts the status quo. Offline protests are not without risks. They can involve potential for arrest, violence, or legal repercussions. However, the potential benefits of raising awareness, building solidarity, and influencing change can be significant. This can force authorities to acknowledge the issue and potentially concede to demands. Offline protests are more likely to attract coverage from traditional media outlets like TV news channels and newspapers. This wider media reach can significantly amplify the message and raise public awareness.

### **Shaheen Bagh Protest**

The Shaheen Bagh protest in 2019 was a significant moment in the history of protests in India. The protest acted as a powerful symbol of dissent against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) seen as discriminatory on religious grounds. The protest's long duration, lasting from December 2019 to March 2020, garnered significant attention globally. The protest showcased the power of peaceful resistance and the potential for social change through collective action. As the protest was spearheaded by Muslim women, it challenged traditional gender roles and burst the myth that



muslim women lack agency. The protest was a pathbreaker in the history of 21st century India due to the leadership of muslim women, the protest's emphasis on non-violent methods like sit-ins, hybrid ways of disseminating this culture of protest across the country and redefining of public spaces as “sites of civic conversations” (Hracs and Bryan 2008). In this age of erasure of public spaces and their increasing privatisation in tune with the demands of the market, the very act of reclaiming public spaces is an act of protest. The Shaheen Bagh protest, led primarily by Muslim women, offers a compelling case study of how the spatiality of protest can be a powerful tool for resistance. Located in a Muslim-majority neighborhood in Delhi, Shaheen Bagh was not a pre-designated protest site. Its very location held significance. Being close to homes allowed women, many participating for the first time, to better manage domestic responsibilities while remaining engaged in the movement. The spatial proximity fostered a sense of community and ownership over the protest. The initial sit-in transformed a busy intersection into a vibrant protest space. Tents, art installations, and community kitchens emerged, creating a sense of permanence and solidarity. This spatial transformation challenged the dominant narrative of public spaces being solely for transit. It reclaimed the street as a site for political expression and community building. “The Street can, thus, be conceived as a space where new forms of the social and the political can be made, rather than a space for enacting ritualized routines” (Sassen, 2011, p. 574).

In the corpus of protests that rattled the nation, the protest site at Shaheen Bagh garnered much attention as it was a celebration of agency and subjectivity exhibited by muslim women to preserve the plurality of citizenship emphasised by our Constitution. A new template was scripted into the protest history of India on 15 December 2019 by a group of 'seemingly' insignificant women from Shaheen Bagh, a nondescript locality in southeast Delhi, when they decided to abandon the warmth of their hearths and brave the biting cold of Delhi, blocking the highway that connected Delhi with Noida, to mark the snapping of their faith in the government and the institutional mechanisms of grievance redressal. The immediate reason for the protest was the police outrage on the evening of 15 December 2019 against the students of Jamia Millia Islamia University who were engaged in anti-CAA protests. However, attributing 'undue' spontaneity on Shaheen Bagh protest goes

against the verve and vigour that inspired a group of 10-12 women to come out of their homes to challenge the governmental brutality against minorities. The CAA was the last straw on the camel's back which ignited in these women a deep sense of fear and anxiety over the possibilities of losing forever their legitimacy in the country. While the COVID 19 lockdown imposed from 24 March 2021 and the police highhandedness resulted in the 'physical' erasure of human bodies and artefacts from the site of protest, the metaphorical journey of Shaheen Bagh continues through the nodes of resistances that surfaced across the country since then. The dadis and nanis of Shaheen Bagh broke the stereotypes of gender, religion and age in spite of the regular attempts by politicians to "infantilize, delegitimize and malign" them. These muslim women, who were poor and mostly belonging to the working class section of the society, had the resilience in them to sustain continuous backlashes from the government and move ahead with the strike for around 100 days when COVID-19 struck the death knell on all forms of political activism of the civil society. Their protest reflected the effectiveness of "quiet resistance" (Rajalakshmi 2020) and strong convictions in creating inconvenient disruptions to the new forms of governmentality that vitiated the social fabric of diversity and tolerance in India. They epitomised the emerging discourses of divergent voices (Thapar 2020) that contested the new patterns of knowledge imposed on the nation by the majoritarian government. What began as a sit-in protest in a small locality in south Delhi soon escalated into a nationwide phenomenon, transforming 'Shaheen Bagh' into a model of resistance against the government. The nation was caught off guard with this unprecedented wave of protest spearheaded by women of all age groups, "emerging from the shadows of men, from the confines of domesticity to take their place as equal citizens in a pluralist democracy" (Salam ).

### **Shaheen Bagh & Visualisation of Protest**

The significance of these protests intensified through ways in which it grew beyond CAA and became "mobilization of the discontented" with the effective use of cultural and political texts for collective action. With the extent of mediatisation that define and decide the experiential world of the 21st century, the repertoire of methods of protest is also expanding. The protest at Shaheen Bagh was enriched through the creative use of verbal and visual texts that attracted the attention

of citizens. The embodied visibility of the protest was constructed through specific forms of articulation. “The articulation of protest entails finding a language for protest, the vocalization, the verbalization, or the visualization of political protest...” (Steyerl, 2012, p.78). The protesters were quite inventive in experimenting with existing narratives as well as scripting and choreographing new ones and circulating them in the mediascapes. In this age of heightened visibility, visual texts were extensively used in the forms of street arts and installations. The street art at Shaheen Bagh manifested in various forms. Walls and public spaces were adorned with murals and graffiti depicting powerful messages. Images of prominent figures like Gandhi and Ambedkar, alongside powerful slogans and quotes, resonated with the protestors' demands for equality and justice. Posters featuring evocative imagery and thought-provoking poems became a common sight. These portable artworks allowed for wider dissemination of the protest message. A large number of street art consisted of images of muslim women dressed in shades of the national flag of India representing the nation as well as images of the Constitution of India. Artist Tanzeela's graffiti of the muslim women in tricolour in anger, exhorting everyone to speak up together with smaller images of muslim women reverberated across the nation (Singh 2020). Yet another mural by the Fearless Collective carried the images of two muslim women, the Constitution of India and the image of a phoenix bird representing the undaunting spirit of the protesters to save the nation (“About Us - The Fearless Collective” n.d.). Creative installations, like a giant map of India rejecting CAA-NPR-NRC, served as powerful symbols of unity and resistance. The Artists of Resistance collective placed an installation titled ‘Women of Resistance’, a 15 x 4 feet cut-out made of cardboard with images of muslim women (Agrawal 2020). These visual narratives were instrumental in breaking the stereotyped image of the muslim women as weak and vulnerable together with making loud statements to save the constitutional values that defined the nation. Images depicting the Indian flag, the Constitution, or caged birds conveyed the protestors' concerns about democratic rights.

There was also a proliferation of online images that further solidified the national uproar against CAA. The Indian American Muslim Association, in its twitter account, posted a cartoon image of a muslim woman, holding the Constitution of India, with a frightened look on her face staring at the cage behind her that has imprisoned her wings, her voice (symbolised using the image of a

speaker), the media (symbolised by the image of a newspaper) and freedom of expression (symbolised by the image of a pencil). The cartoon was circulated with the tagline “Shaheen Bagh Movement: From breaking stereotypes, shattering myths to inspiring millions globally”. There were cartoons that tried to alert the citizens by warning them of the dangers of an authoritarian regime that is currently a threat to muslims but could be against each one of them later. Ita Mehrotra’s *Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection* carried a graphic image of a group of muslim girl students, with one of them proclaiming that “Today it is us, tomorrow it will be the whole country” (Ghosal 2021). Mehrotra’s work further underscores the importance of visuality in the protest as it used the graphic format of narration. She has also created posters with the title ‘Women of Shaheen Bagh’ that were shared widely on Facebook and Instagram. All the posters had images of muslim women, daring to fiercely challenge the establishment and refusing to be silenced. The posters defined the protest as an organic one with muslim women of all ages coming to the fore without anyone prodding them to do so (Mehrotra 2020).

### **Protest Narratives**

Creative writings were another form of narrative that was shared by the protesters across different platforms. The poem "Hum Dekhenge" by Faiz Ahmad Faiz played a multifaceted role in the Shaheen Bagh protests. The powerful verses of "Hum Dekhenge," which translate to "We Shall See," became a potent slogan for the protestors. Its message of perseverance and resistance resonated with the movement's spirit. Lines from the poem were incorporated into visual art installations at Shaheen Bagh. This artistic interpretation added another layer of meaning to the protest space. People recited or sang the poem during demonstrations, infusing the protests with cultural expression and emotional depth. It was elevated to the status of a protest anthem by citizens across the nation expressing solidarity with the Shaheen Bagh protest. The visual images used in the youtube videos of the poem were a documentation of the defining symbols of the nation and the violence meted out by the authoritarian regime (The Quint 2019). Many frames of the

video displayed placards with “No NRC No CAA” written on them. The translations of the poem in regional languages were imbued with cultural symbols of the region. For instance, the tamil version wrote ‘No NRC’ and ‘No CAA’ beside the image of a ‘kolam’ (a traditional design drawn by tamil women using rice flour in front of their house at the crack of dawn as a mark of auspiciousness) (Citizens Against CAA 2020). Thus the poem written by the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1979 against the repressive regime of General Zia-ul-Haq attained iconic status as the narrativisation of the desire for freedom and peace.

There were poems written specifically to express solidarity with people’s resistance to CAA. "Hum Kagaz Nahi Dikhayenge" (We Will Not Show Our Papers) is a powerful poem by Indian lyricist and comedian Varun Grover (Staff 2020). “We will pitch our tents here, The NRC papers, we won't show / We will save the Constitution before we go, The NRC papers, we won't show” (Staff 2020). These lines are pregnant with a strong sense of resistance against the regime which attempts to transform the basic features of our constitution. It is also another way of saying that India as a nation-state was born through the Constitution which is in danger now. If the leaders of our national movement fought for 'Mother India', the masses in India were now fighting for the 'constitutionality of India.' The poem's central theme is defiance against attempts to disenfranchise citizens based on documentation. The speaker asserts their identity and belonging, refusing to be reduced to a piece of paper. The lines "Tanashah aakar jayenge hum kagaz nahi dikhayenge" (Dictators will come and go, but we will not show our documents) became a rallying cry during the protests. The poem evokes feelings of anger, frustration, and determination to resist. "Kagaz" (papers) represents the attempt to define citizenship through bureaucratic processes. Refusing to show them becomes a symbol of reclaiming one's identity. The poem "Write me Down, I am an Indian" by Ajmal Khan, modeled on Mahmoud Darwish's 'Write down! I am an Arab', Hafiz Ahmed's 'Write Down, I am a Miyah' , contains lines powerful enough to resist the erasure of Muslims from the landscape of India and the text of the constitution. The poem deprecates the call for documents to establish one's identity as Indian and underscores the unquestionable 'Indianness' of muslims in spite of the different strategies of the right-wing ideologues, for instance the demolishing of the masjid. The poem also confirms the historical significance of muslims through references to his ancestors being sons of this land and participants of the national movement: "I

want to show you the boot and bullets on their chests / when they fell down with the British bullets" (At 2019). The moral right of the regime to question muslims is also critiqued: "The copy of a confession at Cellular Jail / And / The blood stains of Gandhi on your hand / Do you want me to remind you more those ?." The resilience of muslims in resisting the regime is highlighted through "This is my land / If I have born here / I will die here." Amir Aziz, a Jamia alumnus wrote these cryptic lines proclaiming his relentless pursuit of self-respect, reflecting an indomitable spirit to fight the establishment: "Mere hi watan mein, mujhe haq ke bajaye bheekh diya jaaye, mujhe manzoor nahin (In my own country, I am given alms instead of my rights, I refuse to accept)" (Joshi 2020). "Sab Yaad Rakha Jayega" ("Everything will be Remembered") by Aziz, later recited by Pink Floyd's co-founder and guitarist Roger Waters, in a protest march at London, warns the regime of the power of memories in surviving all forms of extermination. Any number of killings will not help the regime cleanse the crimes done to humanity because "Kill us, we will become ghosts and write / of your killings, with all the evidence" (Everything Will Be Remembered 2020). While the regime had devised its own methods of manipulating the judiciary, "You write jokes in courts, / we will write justice on the walls." Even if the authorities lack a sense of justice, the protesters will retaliate by scripting a revolution in the sky. "You write injustice on the earth, / We will write revolution in the sky."

The protesters were also using creative writing to challenge the accusations of the establishment. There were attempts to read down the significance of the protests emerging in different parts of the country by calling the protesters "tukde tukde gang." The same phrase was used by Madara alias Rahul Negi who is an Indian rapper and pop artist as the title of his rap song. This song is filled with harsh criticisms against the government and the media. "Our ministers prowl the country raping the nation / While our broad-chested PM is missing-in-action" (An Anthem for the Times 2019). Puneet Sharma, bollywood musician, used the medium of song to put the government in the dock. In his poem titled "Tum Kaun Ho Bey", he questions the very sanctity of the government which has turned against its own citizens: "Aap ke paas lathi ho sakti hai, eentein ho sakti hain ghar mein, aankhon mein ho sakta hai gussa/ Lekin aap hinsa ka sahara na lein, aap sarkar nahin hain (You may have sticks, bricks stacked at home, rage reflecting in your eyes/ But

don't take to violence because you are not the government)." Hussain Haidry, with his groundbreaking poem "*Hindustani Musalmaan* ", took social media by storm. Initially recited by him at Kommune, a performing arts forum in Mumbai, it was widely shared on social media for the definition of Indian Muslim it offers: "What kind of Muslim am I, bhai? / I know I'm an Indian Muslim." What follows these lines are the most eclectic explanations to the idea of an "Indian Muslim" bringing together the different states and religious practices. The Indian Muslim becomes an amalgam of heterogeneous practices: "The holy Gita speaks in me, / An Urdu newsprint thrives in me, / Divine is Ramadan in me, / The Ganges washes sins in me." The muslim identity has also been marked by a set of violences meted out by the nation-state: "I'm in Babri's demolished dome... / the Madrasa's shattered ceilings, / the embers flaming a riot, / I'm in the garment stained with blood." The poem ends by depicting the Hindustani Musalman to be in possession of the temple, mosque, gurudwara and church (*Hindustani Musalmaan*). There were theatre groups expressing their solidarity with the protesting women at Shaheen Bagh. One of the theatre groups as well was named as 'Inquilab Ki Rasoi' ('Revolution in the Kitchen') which came up with a 10 minutes play to support the protest (The Print 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Shaheen Bagh thus exists as one of the most conspicuous protest movements of the 21st century comprising a variety of performances. This paper has been an attempt to bring to the fore the diverse ways in which the protest was transformed into a spectacle so as to capture the attention of the entire nation. The protesters used aesthetics effectively to craft the narratives by raising pertinent issues. Through the select narratives cited in this paper, we get deeper insights into the ways in which "protestors document and produce protest through aesthetics" (McGarry 17). Aesthetics can be a concise way to convey the protest's message. Symbols, colours, and even collective formations can all be used to express ideas without words. The way a protest looks and feels can evoke emotions in both the protestors and the audience. Rather than limiting itself to specific instances of protest, 'shaheen bagh' turned into a national phenomenon and an expression of dissent against the power structures. Theatre director M K Raina's comment on Shaheen Bagh

exemplifies this. “Shaheen Bagh is no longer Shaheen Bagh. It has become India,” he said (Express News Service 2020).

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## Postcolonial Border Creation and Migration: Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh

Konkumoni Boro

### Abstract

*Migration became a political reality in postcolonial South Asia with the modern state building process, which led to arbitrary drawing of interstate borders, in turn leading to varying consequences on the population transferred as a result of border creation. The inevitable consequence of the process of creation of modern nation state was that large number of people were pushed out of one territory in the pursuit of creation of a homogenous nation thereby leading to persecution of many. The population flows generated demographic changes producing issues of insider and outsider; majority and minority and native and settler. It is under these circumstances that the question of membership into a political and social community comes in, identity gets reconstructed, and the question of integration emerges. A large number of forced population movement has been caused by the attempt to attain cultural homogeneity by asserting authority and control of one ethnic group over the other. This process forced a numbers of minority groups to leave their countries of origin thereby leaving them in a state of statelessness. As they were neither accepted as citizens in their country of origin nor in their country of residence. Thus, many lingered as stateless people with no political status nor any rights and benefits. One such community is the Chakmas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Chakmas migrated to India from East Pakistan due to religious atrocities and submergence of their land because of the construction of Kaptai Hydel Dam. Against this backdrop, the paper attempts to explore the politics of migration and resistances in the process of their integration in the host state.*

Keywords: migration, border creation, Chakmas, Arunachal Pradesh.

### Introduction

In pre-colonial South Asia, before the introduction of modern state, border was considered to be an alien concept, an artificial construct imposed by distant powers (Mishra, 2014, p.141). With the coming in of the modern era, there has been an attempt to homogenize nation despite of its cultural and regional groupings and ethnic groups that may demand for political autonomy (Donnan, 1998, p.3). As a result, the process of

territorialization of border areas through modern way of map making was introduced in Europe. Gradually its application has been widely spread to the newly decolonized states in Asia and other regions beyond Europe (M. B. Schendel, 1997, p.212). In fact, physical boundaries were fluid before colonization. With colonization, the demarcation of clear-cut borders and their cartographic representation became more prominent and acquired administrative importance in some of these regions including South Asia (M. B. Schendel, 1997, p. 222). This was an outcome of colonial annexation of the peripheral regions, which Franke (2009) reiterates as a part of the imperialist policy of expansion to extract resources from these areas (Franke, 2009, p.125). Similarly, James C. Scott's (2010) study of the Zomias reveals that a non-state space exists in the uplands of South East Asia which was aimed by the modern state to include within the state sphere in the name of uplifting and developing those regions (Scott, 2010, p.5). Scott termed this procedure as the 'enclosure system.' He argues that by the enclosure method the state attempts to monetize the people and their resources so that they become rentable. Not only economic but a total demographic transition occurred.

The modern state building process in South Asia after partition have given birth to many "excluded groups" who are either termed as "denizens", or "stateless people", or "aliens" and so on (Baruah, 2003, p.183). As demarcating the territories, installing barbed wires, erecting fences and posts became a political reality; the state building process in South Asia was accompanied by demographic shifts and massive population transfers. The inevitable consequence of the process of creation of modern nation state in South Asia was that large numbers of people were pushed out of one territory in the pursuit of creation of homogenous nations thereby leading to persecution of many (Boro, 2019, p.109). One such community is the Chakmas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The Chakmas made continuous efforts to determine their status, identity, space, and homeland. Their political status and citizenship is determined by the modern state building process. Chakmas migrated to India from East Pakistan due to religious atrocities and submergence of their land because of the construction of Kaptai Hydel Dam (Chakma and Ahsan, 1989, p.960). One of the host areas of these transborder communities is India's Northeast. The Chakmas have mostly settled in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Tripura. Whereas the Chakmas residing all over India are citizens but those in the state of Arunachal Pradesh are still negotiating for their integration.

### Postcolonial border creation in South Asia

Territorial demarcation and state building process in South Asia was accompanied by demographic shifts, population transfers and arbitrary drawing of political boundaries. Territorial partition that happened between India and Pakistan was not just about drawing the imaginary lines on the map, but was also about the absolute demographic alteration while restructuring the population as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs that were transferred from one side to the other. The creation of borders during partition of the Indian subcontinent left deep impact in the lives and memories of the borderlanders. The mammoth and complex task of boundary creation was assigned to a boundary commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliff who had no knowledge about the character and composition of the place and was also not accustomed with the complexities of the territory he was going to divide (Kudaishya, 2000, p.31). Radcliff was asked to complete the job within a couple of weeks. Therefore, the boundary making procedure was demoted into more of an administrative and technical phenomenon rather than considering the social composition and other complexities of the place. This was a challenging task because the territorial basis on which the partition would happen remained undefined.

Demarcation of political boundaries in the postcolonial South Asia impacted the construction and reconstruction of identities of borderland communities. Demographic transitions and flow of population across borders due to the newly drawn postcolonial borders, questioned the identities of belonging of the borderland communities. The sudden creation of border created categories of insiders and outsiders by process of inclusion and exclusion in terms of citizenship, ethnicity, gender, religion, lifestyle and phenotype. It created new majorities and minorities and new ways of signalling who belonged, who was expelled and who opted out. There was emergence of new national identities. After decolonization, the post partition states involved in the task of state building by consistently reproducing territorial boundaries, including some and leaving out others. In the process of demarcating the boundaries of the political community, the state always leaves out some who are not included within the purview of membership of that territory (Jayal, 2013, p.45). The membership into a community is again connected to outlining boundaries of a territory.

### Migration of Chakmas from CHT to Arunachal Pradesh

The Chakmas are one of the dominant groups in Chittagong Hill Tracts (now in Bangladesh) whose identities are at stake with the drawing and redrawing of the post-colonial India's eastern borders. The identities of Chakmas as citizens of Pakistan changed soon after East Pakistan was separated from West Pakistan and the state of Bangladesh was created in 1971. Those who migrated from East Pakistan due to increasing religious atrocities from the majority Bengali speaking Muslims to India, before the creation of Bangladesh, remained as stateless citizens in India as they are neither accepted as citizens by the Indian state nor they are recognized as citizens by Bangladesh. Hence, the Chakmas have been deprived of the opportunity to determine their identities. The identities of the Chakmas were re-constructed when the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which was practically devoid of Muslim, was made a part of Pakistan, although the inhabitants wanted to be a part of the state of India. The Chakmas gained the political identity of the citizen of Pakistan until 1971. When East Pakistan was separated from West Pakistan in 1971, their political identity was reconstructed as citizens of Bangladesh.

When after partition, CHT was forcefully made a part of Pakistan, the postcolonial government of Pakistan undertook various policies by which attempts were made to marginalizing the hill people and assimilating them with the mainstream Bengali speaking Muslims. Consequently, the government encouraged migration of plains people who were hitherto restricted from entering the hills during the colonial period; into the sparsely populated hill tracts. These Bengali speaking people comprises of 99 percent of the total population of Bangladesh and the hill people who the Bengalis refer to as 'primitive', 'wild tribes', are only 1 percent of the total population<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the postcolonial initiatives of state building and nation building along with the sway of development, left the hill people as alien in their own land. The hydropower project that was set up in the Karnaphuli River by the Pakistan government, made inroads for the Bengali Muslim people from the plains into CHT in huge numbers. Scholars have argued that influx of non-tribal into the hills has been an outcome of a well-planned policy of the government<sup>2</sup>. Through the policy of development, the government conspired to settle Bengali Muslims in the hills and flush out the hill tribes people from the Chittagong Hill Tract. As a result, the development projects of establishing more industries, paper mills and hydroelectric projects were carried out. These projects became pull factors for the people from the plains as many job opportunities were created. The lives of the hill people were at stake by these projects as the Kaptai Hydrel Electric Project had submerged a vast area inhabited by the Chakmas uprooting many families. These projects were installed with an aim of altering the economy of the uplands from self-

sufficient economy to market centered economy. As a result, gradually the chakmas crossed the national borders in search of security and shelter in the Indian states of Mizoram and Tripura. Many were also rehabilitated in Arunachal Pradesh by the government of India. Those residing in Mizoram and Tripura have attained Indian citizenship but Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh are still deprived of Indian citizenship rendering them stateless.

The Chakmas migrated during 1964-69 from erstwhile East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) to India. The Chakmas, during their migration followed two routes to reach India; one through Tripura and the other through Lushai Hills district (present day Mizoram). As they moved to Assam, the State Government of Assam expressed its incapability to accommodate the Chakmas as many new refugees were already settled in Assam. A letter No.GA-71/64 date April 10, 1964, Shri Vishnu Sahay, then Governor of Assam, wrote to then Chief Minister of Assam, Shri P.B Chaliha regarding the settlement of Chakma refugees in the Tirap frontier division. Another letter No.RHM-24/6410 dated April 27, 1964, Shri A.N Kidwai, Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, responded and wrote to the Advisor to the Governor of Assam (who was in charge of NEFA) to make necessary arrangements for settlement of 10,000 Chakma refugees. Again in April 21, vide letter No.RR-17/64, the Advisor to the Governor General of Assam, sought proposals from Political Officers for resettlement of refugees along the Indo-China border to strengthen the frontiers and remonstrate China's claim over Arunachal Pradesh and its continuous attempt to occupy Arunachal. As a result, 2,902 Chakma and Hajong families consisting of 14,888 persons were settled in Changlang (former Tirap), Papum Pare (former Subansiri) and Namsai (former Lohit) districts of Arunachal Pradesh in various batches. The primary drive behind the settlement of Chakmas in the empty lands was to populate and strengthen otherwise deserted border regions. Therefore, the land which were impenetrable jungles, were cleared by the refugees and converted into agricultural lands. It was only in 1973 that the Chakmas were officially allotted plots from 3 to 5 acres per family. However, they argue that no family was allotted 5 acres of land and who could appease the officials was allotted more land than others. Again, in 1979, a resettlement drive was undertaken under which new villages were created to settle Chakmas and Hajongs families.

Arunachal Pradesh is a state, which is marked by high level of heterogeneity in terms of its culture, tradition, language, religion, dress, food habits and so on. Before getting the name of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972, it was known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The frontier tracts came under the administration of the government of Assam for an interim period of 1947 to 1951. During this period, the powers of the

Governor were curtailed and he had to function on the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam. Again, with the commencement of the new Constitution of India in 1950, the status of the frontier tract experienced new changes and it came under the direct control of the President of India. NEFA still continued to be a part of Assam, but its administration was directly controlled by the President of India with the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the President in delivering his duties. Another significant change regarding administration of NEFA came when the responsibility of its administration was transferred from the Ministry of Home Affairs to Ministry of External Affairs (Singh, 2010, p.56). Again, in 1954, through the North East Frontier Area (Administration) Regulation of 1954, these hill tracts along with some Naga hill areas was renamed as North East Frontier agency comprising of Lohit, Subansiri, Siang, Kameng and Tirap Frontier Divisions (ibid). The Tuensang Frontier Division, earlier included in then NEFA, was amalgamated with the present day Nagaland in 1957 (ibid). NEFA was elevated to a Union Territory on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1972 by the North Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act, 1971. Finally, NEFA emerged as a full-fledged state on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1987 under the provisions of the State of Arunachal Pradesh Act 1986. The administrative changes have a major role to play in the socio-political status of the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Resistances against the Chakmas**

There are three widely debated probable solutions as discussed by scholars while dealing with the influx of refugees. They are repatriation, local integration in the host country and resettlement in a third country (Jacobsen, p. 655). There are various factors that determine the responses and policies of the host state and its people towards the incoming group of people. For local integration, theorists have argued that three primary factors that determine refugee integration are; length of time of refugee stay, shared ethnicity and economic sustainability (Kunz 1981, Fielden 2008). It is believed that religious affinity would promote peaceful coexistence thereby making refugee integration a smoother and easier process. The Chakmas claim that the Singphos and Khamtis were informed and they consented the settlement of the Chakmas because they share similar religion. On the other hand, AAPSU alleges that the local communities were not informed and it was without their consent that the Chakmas and Hajongs were settled in the region. In the initial years after the settlement of the Chakmas, between 1964-1986, there was no resentment by the locals against the Chakmas. This could be due to two reasons; one, NEFA being very sparsely populated; there was enough land for the Chakmas to settle away from the locals. Second, since till 1979, NEFA was kept away from the sphere of elections, the opinion of the indigenous people was never taken on the issue of the



settlement of the Chakmas (S. K. Chaudhury 2016). The resentment against the settlers was first circulated and most powerfully exercised by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU). A sudden change in the attitude of the state government and the local population towards the Chakmas was evident in the 80's. In 1980, Chakmas were banned from government services and Chakma children from government schools. The ration cards that were given to the Chakmas as refugees were taken away in the 80's. Therefore, Chakmas are now left in a situation where they can neither avail the benefits of refugees nor the benefits of being citizens. Chakmas are denied of even birth certificates, and also deprived of government jobs. The Chakmas are in a continuous battle of constructing and re-constructing their identities. The resistance and the claims of the Chakmas took an organized form with the formation of CCRCAP (Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas) on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1991, in New Delhi. CCRCAP has been continuously struggling to negotiate the identity of Chakmas and with the state. Problems with the Chakmas aggravated and the situation worsened in 1994 when 'Quit Arunachal' notice was issued by APPSU on Chakmas. This was followed by various atrocities on the Chakmas. Due to mounting attacks on the Chakmas, threatening their lives and liberty, the CCRCAP petitioned to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) against violation of the human rights of the Chakmas and their forcible eviction. After continuous efforts of the Chakmas, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004, the Election Commission of India directed the Electoral registration officers in three Assembly Constituencies of 46-Chowkham, 49-Bordumsa-Diyun and 50-Miao of Arunachal Pradesh to include the names of 1497 eligible electors in the electoral rolls to enable them to cast their votes. However, to the dismay of the Chakmas, names of 500 voters were deleted from the electoral rolls. Again, the people with a voter id are still deprived of other political and social benefits, like they are not allowed to issue Permanent Resident Certificates. The ambiguities of the status of the Chakmas reveal resentment at the local level against the Chakmas. A milestone was achieved by CCRCAP when on September 17, 2015, Supreme Court delivered the judgment directing the State of Arunachal Pradesh and the Union of India, to finalize the conferment of citizenship rights on eligible Chakmas and also to ensure compliance of directions in judicial decisions referred to in earlier part of this order for protection of their life and liberty and against their discrimination in any manner. The exercise may be completed at the earliest preferably within three months from today. The above judgment by the Supreme Court was not implemented until 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017 when the Home Ministry complied with the 2015 Supreme Court judgment to grant citizenship rights to Chakmas and Hajongs who fled erstwhile East Pakistan in 1964 (Singh 2017). However, the central government came up with an idea of 'limited citizenship' for the Chakmas and Hajongs, which means citizenship rights for Chakmas, and Hajongs does not include ownership of land. This judgment of limited citizenship to Chakma and Hajongs was declared

in order to ensure that 'indigenous people's rights won't be diluted,' said Minister of State for Home, Kiren Rijiju.<sup>3</sup> The Chakmas feel that citizenship without land rights is 'no citizenship' as they argue that ownership of land that has been accessed and processed for more than fifty years, now it is a basic human right without which all other rights are meaningless. The response of the other ethnic communities; 'the local Arunachalis' was very outrageous as they claim granting citizenship rights to the Chakmas is a threat to their 'indigenous identity'. The solution of 'limited citizenship' remains hare brained, as outlines of the concept are still not defined and hence remains ambiguous. This ambiguity raises confusion and fear of the unknown both in the minds of the Chakmas as well as the non-Chakmas (Boro 2023, p. 527).

An important ground of resistance of the host community particularly AAPSU against the Chakmas is that the settlement of Chakmas was temporary and not permanent. The grounds of this argument arise from the 'protected area' status that has been assigned to the state of Arunachal Pradesh by various laws from the colonial times. The locals perceive the British efforts to preserve the tribal society and protect it from outside interference through the rules and regulations guaranteeing a 'protected status' and exclusive rights to the resources, property, and jobs of the state to the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> The British effort to isolate these hill regions and prevent outside interference is prevalent even after seventy decades of decolonization. Accordingly, Part X of the constitution of India guarantees the state of Arunachal Pradesh with Scheduled Tribe Status under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.<sup>5</sup> The special status granted to the state of Arunachal Pradesh has been contrary to the settlement of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh. Contending settlement of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh, Kiren Rijiju states, "They are staying here as guests. They are not entitled to get a permanent resident certificate of citizenship here," at a press meet on April 22.<sup>6</sup> It has been observed that the claims of the AAPSU as probable solution of the Chakma issue and claims of citizenship, rights and identity of those of the Chakmas are poles apart. In order to come a viable solution, both the parties have to come to a middle ground through negotiations with support from both the Union Government and the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

## **Conclusion**

The Chakma-Hajong issue has been over politicized which if not met with a permanent solution at the earliest, the situation will aggravate in the state. It is also important to take note here that the Chakmas and the Hajongs are the victims of unjust partition and consequent modern state building process and homogenizing tendencies, leading to a majoritarian democracy, where the voices of the minorities have

been suppressed. Furthermore, the so-called refugees very well qualify to be citizens according to the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955. As the Chakmas those who migrated are eligible for citizenship under Section 5 (a) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 and those who were born in India are already citizens under Section 3 (a) of the Act. So, the Chakmas have already been deprived of their rightful entitlements and benefits for more than five decades now. More delays will only deteriorate the situation and lead to further deprivation of the community. This is a case where the refugees were settled with full support and assistance by the government in a place, which is protected under a number of laws that restrict the entry and settlement of Indian citizens let alone refugees and now left in a state of statelessness.

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## Nationalism, Religion and *Ramrajya*:

### Comparing the Ideas of Gandhi and Sangh Parivar

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#### Abstract

*Religious identification with nationalism is a complex phenomenon. Many nations have incorporated religious icons to create a sense of commonality. In India, the nationalist imagination and its construct used religious symbols as a convenient flag to fight against colonialism. For example, Gandhi frequently talked about Ramrajya. Sangh Parivar's ideology is explicitly based on Hindu understanding of national identity and demands a common place of worship for Hindus, known as Ram Janmabhoomi movement. This article examines the relationship between nationalism and religion and convergence and non-convergence in the ideas of Gandhi and Sangh Parivar on Ramrajya.*

**Key words:** Nationalism, Religion, *Ramrajya*, Gandhi, Sangh Parivar.

#### Introduction:

The concept of nationalism, though used to denote a homogeneous category, is not always linear. It essentially means that nationalism and its theoretical underpinnings have had differing interpretations. For instance, if we compare Gandhi's views on nationalism with that of Savarkar's, it would be evident that they are not categorically similar. Imagination is a fundamental element of nationalism, but imagining a democratic secular state and theocratic state is totally different. So, nationalism is a complex process. Defining nationalism as 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity' (Smith 2008, 15) is a political aspiration; while defining nationalism as a community of collective common customs, traditions and shared historical experiences provoked cultural aspirations of nationalism.

Religion, one of the core elements of nation, has played a vital role in consolidating nationalism. Religion is a 'method of establishing communication through common practice' (Hobsbawm 1990, 68) and the sense of brotherhood between people who otherwise have nothing much in common. The linkages between religious identification with nationalism remain complex and extremely opaque. Sometimes it leads to disunity between groups and nation. Though the spirit of toleration has grown and religious freedom has risen, but in contemporary time religion has emerged as a unifying and divisive force in nation building process.

India witnessed the emergence of religious nationalism during the nationalist struggle, especially after Non-cooperation movement. Irfan Habib classified Indian nationalism into two categories: a liberal-inclusive nationalism and religion-based nationalism. Liberal-inclusive nationalism also used religion, constructing the concept of glorious ancient past with Hindu symbols for rejuvenating Indian cultural heritage and national culture. 'Religion-based nationalism ultimately led to the two-nation theory and the creation of Pakistan' (Habib et al. 2017, 24).

This article attempts to investigate the relationship between nationalism and religion and the convergence and non-convergence in the ideas of Gandhi and Sangh Parivar on *Ramrajya*. The article is divided into four sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the relationship between nationalism and religion. The second section discusses the understanding of Gandhi on religion and *Ramrajya*. The third section explores the trajectory of Ram Mandir issue and the politics of Sangh Parivar. The fourth section tries to explore the contrasting ideas of Gandhi and Sangh Parivar on *Ramrajya*.

### **Nationalism and Religion: Interlinkages**

Nationalism and religion are two powerful forces that have played a very significant role in shaping the human history and politics. The relation between nationalism and religion is very close, as the examples of India, Pakistan, Israel and Palestine demonstrate. 'Religion is an ancient and well-tried method of establishing communion through common practice and a sort of brotherhood between people who otherwise have nothing much in common' (Hobsbawm 1990, 68).

The relations between national consciousness and religion have always had both constructive and destructive side. Nationalist movements have also been inspired by religious icons to fight against colonial ruler. In India, the nationalist imagination and its construct used religion as a convenient flag to mobilize people and to fight

against colonialism. For example, nationalist leaders like Tilak constructed the concept of a glorious ancient India with Hindu symbols as a strategy in their effort to combat the imperialist powers. Tilak started Ganesh festival (1893), Shivaji festival (1894) for rejuvenating Indian cultural heritage and national culture. Mahatma Gandhi also emphasized the Vedantic concept of soul-force to combat the imperialist power and frequently talked about *Ramrajya* which was linked with historical past and artistic heritage. Nationalist leaders hoped to shape a common Indian identity based glorious past.

However, the relationship between nationalism and religion is not always positive. Conflicts may arise when different religious groups coexist side by side within a nation, leading to tensions over questions of identity, power, representation, distribution of resources etc. This is particularly evident in countries where religious diversity exists, there may arise competing nationalist narratives, each emphasizing a particular religious or ethnic group and its historical and cultural significance. Hobsbawm observed that,

‘Pakistan was the product of a national movement among the Muslim of the then Indian Empire, though it may well be regarded as a reaction against an all-Indian national movement which failed to give adequate recognition to the special feelings or requirements of Muslims, and though, in an era of the modern nation-state, territorial partition seemed to be the only available formula...’ (Hobsbawm 1990, 70).

The partition of then Indian Empire in 1947, resulting in the creation of India and Pakistan, serves as an example of how religious differences can become intertwined with nationalist aspirations, leading to mass migrations and communal violence.

In contemporary times, the rise of religious nationalism has become a significant global phenomenon. Some political parties and leaders construct religious identity to mobilize support, as well as framed their agendas as a defence of religious values. ‘Since the late 1970s, nationalist movements based on the assertion that one majority ethnic or religious group defines a nation have emerged with new force and creativity- with new rituals and spectacles, including televised violence- to revalorize old emotions and symbolic resources’ (Ludden et al 2005, 2). Today, religious beliefs and discourses in personal and public life becoming more and more important.



Fukuyama argues, 'Sometime in the middle of the second decade of twenty-first century, world politics changed dramatically' (Fukuyama 2019, 3). 'The most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic; they are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question human can face: Who are we?... People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs' (Huntington 1996, 21). The ideas of Huntington became popular after 9/11 incident and many scholars focus their study on the signal of resurgence of religion in domestic as well as international politics. The character of 'global politics in the second decade of twenty-first century is that the dynamic new forces shaping it are nationalist or religious parties and politicians, the two faces of identity politics' (Fukuyama 2019, 74). Fukuyama also points out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ideology is explicitly based on a Hindu understanding of Indian national identity. Lord Rama has now become a central figure in Indian politics. Before discussing BJP's Ram-politics, the researcher seeks to present Gandhi's inclusive idea of *Ramrajya*.

### **Gandhi and his *Ramrajya***

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a religious person and a great devotee of Lord Rama. Gandhi said that the term religion implies self-realization or knowledge of self. Gandhi obtained the affection of religion from his childhood, when he read Ramayana, an ancient Indian epic that narrates the life and teachings of Lord Rama. He wrote,

'...there was in me a fear of ghosts and spirits. Rambha [an old servant] suggested as a remedy for this fear the repetition of Ramayana... I began repeating Ramayana to cure my fear of ghost and spirits... I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today Ramayana is an infallible remedy for me' (Gandhi 1940, 43).

His concept of *Ramrajya* was deeply rooted in his understanding of the Ramayana. Gandhi had an aspiration that one day our nation would have *Ramrajya*, if everyone, including those in a power position, followed certain norms of social and political conduct.

'He envisioned Ramarajya as a State where there was perfect harmony amongst the citizens with happiness and contentment all around, citizens contributing to the economy with honest toil, and the

State giving succour to the needy, poor and destitute - a state of affairs during the reign of King Rama according to *Ramarajyai*' (Srikrishna 2008).

His *Ramrajya* is a non-violent democratic state and the structure of violence would become extinct. There would be no selfishness, no power politics and no conflicts. So, Gandhi lamented the violence of the Bolshevik Revolution. Truth, non-violence or Ahimsa, Sarvodaya were the core philosophy of Gandhi's thought and he considered these an essential part of *Ramrajya*. The decentralization of power was another important component of Gandhi's vision for *Ramrajya*. There is also an economic expression of *Ramrajya* which involves self-sufficient villages. He visualised village autonomy through panchayats. For him, India's economic future would be based on cottage industries, spreading the use of Charkha (spinning wheel) and Khadi (homespun cotton textile).

If we look at it practically, during the time of India's struggle for independence, a majority of the population was illiterate and had little understanding of politics or the concept of independence. In order to mobilize the masses, Gandhi emphasized more on terms like *Ramrajya*, Satyagraha, and Sarvodaya instead of "sovereign state," "development," "reform" etc. These concepts were easily understood and embraced by the common people, helping to unite them in the nationalist movement against the colonial domination, subjugation and exploitation. Gandhi successfully implemented non-violent resistance in the freedom movement, demonstrating the practical efficacy of his philosophy, i.e., *Ramrajya*. Thus, Gandhi accepted the creative force of religion in human history.

'Although he was profoundly influenced by Hinduism, Christianity, and Jainism, his religious thought cut across all of them and was in a class by itself' (Parekh 2001, 35). His religion was not a negation of other religion, he believed in *Sarvadharmasambhava*, i.e., equal respect for all. He considered that all of the world religion should inculcate equality, brotherhood, toleration and freedom.

### **Sangh Parivar and Ram Mandir**

The Sangh Parivar is a collection of Hindu nationalist organizations, which includes the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and several other groups. The Sangh Parivar promotes Hindutva, a form of Hindu nationalism, aiming to establish Hindu cultural nationalism in India. Hindutva forces are also trying to frame narratives, reinterpret Indian civilization, culture and history; reinvent

national or regional or local heroes, traditions; symbols. They constantly try to seize social communities who are not under its influence like tribals, slums, Dalits, Muslims and other periphery areas. They also seek to protect Hindu temples, promote education based on Hindu traditions, and oppose perceived threats from other religious communities.

The Sangh Parivar has often used the concept of '*Ramrajya*' for political mobilization. BJP, the political wing of the Sangh Parivar, promotes Hindutva ideology which is trying to cultivate unique cultural heritage through emotive religious issues. The BJP's connection to the Ram Mandir, Ludden (1996) observed, has been pivotal to its political strategy, playing a significant role in shaping its identity and securing electoral fortunes.

It is a crucial task to find out the origin of myth, cultivation of memories, symbols, values, and traditions which define the unique cultural heritage of a nation. Hindutva's nationalism centres around the 'concepts of primogeniture, racial purity and genetic ancestry as contained in ideas like janmabhumi or birthland/homeland and other emotive aspects that touch upon shared language, food and consanguinity' (Thapar et al 2016, 57). Hindutva forces attempt to explain that the Aryans or the 'Vedic Age' were the foundation of Indian civilization. The process of collective attachments to national landscapes gained more attention to Hindutva discourses. They also demand a common place for worship for all Hindus. This demand was expressed as Ram Janmbhumi movement- the site of Lord Ram's birth in the city of Ayodhya, North India. The BJP's commitment to building the Ram Mandir is a defining aspect of their political identity and strategy.

It must be admitted that from 1987 to 1990, the Indian state-run national television station, Doordarshan began broadcasting the TV serial Ramayan and Mahabharat nationwide. 'What resulted was the largest political campaign in post-independence times, around the symbol of Lord Ram, led by Hindu nationalists' (Rajagopal 2004).

The Ayodhya issue revolves around the Babri Masjid, which was built by Babur. According to the government publications, the general of the Mughal ruler Babur built a mosque after destroying a temple at 'Ram's birthplace' in Ayodhya's Ramkot. The year 1992 marked a critical juncture in the Ayodhya controversy when a large mob marched towards Ayodhya, which was popularly known as *Rath Yatra* (Rama's chariot procession) and demolished the Babri Masjid.

The campaign has exacerbated communal tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. Critics argue that the politicization of religious issues has often led to social strife and violence, undermining India's secular component. 'From the Sangh perspective, communalism is alien to its own program, because Hindu nationalism does not represent one community fighting others in India, but rather the real India struggling to become itself' (Ludden et al. 2005, 16). 'The struggle culminated in a spontaneous popular movement: the people of India, under the leadership of Sants and Sadhus, have launched the biggest mass movement in the history of India to regain the Ram janmabhoomi and to construct the Temple' (p. 31). The incident had a profound impact on Indian politics, media, and popular culture.

'After December 6, rioting spread instantly into many regions of India and also into Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Bombs set Bombay afire and the Indian government immediately accused Pakistan. Communalism engulfed South Asia, as it had in 1947, with violence and death. In April 1993, the killing finally subsided. The Indian government banned the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and two Islamic parties (the Islamic Sevak Sangh and the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind), and though the VHP continued to operate widely in India despite the ban' (p. 17).

Over the years, the legal battle over the Ayodhya site continued. On November 9, 2019, the Supreme Court awarded Hindus control of a disputed religious site in Ayodhya for the construction of a temple; Muslims will be given five acres of land at an alternative site in Ayodhya. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has inaugurated the Ram temple on 22 January 2024. The BJP sees the inauguration as a moment of national pride, a cultural and spiritual achievement.

The inauguration has drawn criticism and raised concerns among those who see it as a manifestation of majoritarian politics, perverse hyper-nationalism sweeping across the land, posing a potential threat to India's secular fabric. Mathew John said, it 'represents the emphatic triumph of religious fundamentalism over secularism, of Hindutva over Hinduism, of religiosity over religion, of exclusion over inclusion, of hate over brotherhood' (John 2024).

'There is poverty, unemployment, and violation of democratic principles in the country. None of it is becoming a point of discussion. Emotional issues are being exploited for political purposes,' Thangal said (The Hindu, 2024). The leader of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti also said that the event is completely for political gains.

However, supporters argue that a new mosque will be constructed in the same region in the near future. It is expected to be a grand project. However, it is unclear whether the opposition will express the same reservations about the mosque as they are currently doing about the construction of the Ram Mandir. Will they view the mosque's construction as against the secular principles of the nation?

### **Convergence and non-convergence**

Both Gandhi and Sangh Parivar draw inspiration from the epic Ramayana. Both interpretations emphasize adherence to religion and traditional values. Both perspectives also stress good governance. However, there are vast differences. Gandhian *Ramrajya* was secular and inclusive and emphasized the unity of all religions. In contrast, a Hindu-centric perspective can be seen in BJP's *Ramrajya*.

Gandhian *Ramrajya* stressed decentralized governance, self-sufficient villages, and small industries utilizing Charkha and Khadi. In contrast, BJP's ideology focused on more centralized governance. It also stresses capitalism, globalization and the free market. But, Gandhian *Ramrajya* believed in small industries and the doctrine of Trusteeship.

Regarding the nature of *Ramrajya*, Gandhi says, 'By Ram Rajya, I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean Ram Raj, the kingdom of God. For me Ram and Rahim are one and the same; I acknowledge no other God but the one God of truth and righteousness' (Gandhi 1929). Gandhi wrote, 'Ramarajya of my dream ensures equal rights alike of prince and pauper' (Gandhi 1934). Gandhi's *Ramrajya* believes in egalitarianism. Gandhi said, 'If the king is mindful of the difficulties of the weakest section of his subjects, his rule would be Ramarajya, it would be people's rule' (Gandhi 1920).

In Hindutva discourse, however, there is a clear distinction made between 'us' and 'other'. The Babri Masjid seems to be a foreign transplant. Indian Islam is portrayed by Hindutva forces as 'being foreign and derivative, alien to India' (Ludden et al. 2005, 5). Some scholars criticized BJP's Ram temple ceremony as symbolic of the formal investiture of the Hindu Rashtra and the transition to a theocratic state. Sahu laments, 'Gandhi's last words when shot... were 'Hey Ram' and he would have reacted the same way at what is happening today in the name of Ram' (The Wire 2024).

The demolition of Babri Masjid occupies a Global significance. Scholars of International politics considered the significance of the study of socio-political transformation in India. Kaplan (1994) called Hindu nationalism a response to Islamic nationalism. Ludden observed,

‘Samuel Huntington formulated these ideas into a framework for analysing global politics as “a clash of civilizations.” In his post-Cold War world order, Islam is a civilization that expanded its power east and west, like an empire, so that today, nationalist Hindus fight Muslims on the east, while Jews and Christians fight Muslims in the west’ (Ludden et al. 2005, 3)

Sangh Parivar believes that building the Ram Temple is a step towards Mahatma Gandhi's vision of *Ramrajya* where the country is governed by truth, justice and law. They also point out that a new mosque will be built in the near future; so Ayodhya has the potential to become a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. But Gandhi did not talk about establishment of a Mandir or Masjid, his vision of nationalism was self-rule, based on soul force and not brute force. ‘Gandhiji did not only mean freedom from the colonial ruler, he also meant the need to transform oneself, to look within and take control of one’s life and destiny’ (Thapar et al. 2016, 65).

It must be admitted that the construction of Ram Mandir is the central issue of the BJP for the General elections, 2024. They seek to establish a majoritarian populism, consolidating the Hindu community. The inauguration of incomplete temple before the election is all about mobilization based on psychological imperatives and emotions.

‘Populist mobilization revolves around expansion of clientelistic networks by consolidating the position of the party’ (Hansen 1999, 137). Generally, populism refers to the clientelist competition and distribution of resources. The Sangh Parivar believed in psychology and emotive issues along with beneficiary schemes, especially for the poor and women. Thus, they seek to establish a majoritarian populism, consolidate the Hindu community.

The democracy of India took a populist turn in 2014, though, the populist elements could be found since 1970s. Gudavarthy argues:

‘... in 2014, India witnessed a dramatic shift to a majoritarian discourse of authentic (Hindu) people; strongman phenomenon that undermined procedural niceties, legal norms and rule of law; centrality of

performance and narrative over mobilization of social identities such as caste, class and language; pre-eminence of personality cult over institutional functioning; foregrounding of culture and civilizational ethos over public discourses on redistribution and justice; penetration of anti-elitist discourse against entitled and entrenched caste/class networks and finally a shift to mobilization based on psychological imperatives, latent emotions and everyday ethics' (Gudavarthy 2024)

Now the question is Who is Ram? And how Sangh Parivar portrayed him? Lord Ram, Hindu God, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu known as Maryada Purushottam or 'the best of men' or 'the supreme Purusa' (personality), embodying the qualities of compassion, truth, and morality. Ram for Hindus, especially in North India not only a God, but a symbol of emotion itself. Sangh Parivar gave the slogan, 'kan kan mein Ram,' meaning Ram in every particle. Ram is portrayed as a hope, courage and unity for the nation and that is why BJP has emerged as a crusader of Hindutva or Hindu religion. So, the majority of the Hindi-speaking belt will surely give their trust to BJP and that is why it will influence BJP's electoral poll.

Compared to metropolitan citizens and youth on the one side and rural or peripheral residents on the other, the latter are primarily influenced by the Ram Mandir issue. The Hindutva forces realized that common masses, especially in agrarian societies, want religious empowerment. Therefore, the Hindutva-inspired bodies focus on building temples as social religious spaces for the common masses and propagate Sanatan Dharma. They aspire for a prayer-house/small-temples where they can assemble in the evening and worship, sing religious songs and share pleasures and pains with neighbours. Therefore, a temple not only expresses religious meanings, but also provides social meaning by providing respect and dignity for a community. Therefore, we can say, the journey of Hindu nationalism from the margins to the centre stage of India's political scenario is not a linear process, but the result of decades of systematic organizational works of different emotive issues and imaginative political techniques.

## **Conclusion**

The present political scenario raises significant questions of linking nationalism and religion with populism. Today religion has been on the upswing as a political force and considered that religion is not only capable of inhabiting modern nation states, but also a comfortable driving within a secular democratic framework. Today

populist leaders claiming democratic legitimacy via procedures and elections have emphasized national sovereignty with national culture and traditions. Political analysts have tried to investigate the linkages of national traditions, religion with national consciousness. The analysis of 'Ram-politics' demonstrates the complex ways in which nationalism and religion are intertwined. Religion seems to be a populist political force which articulates people's cultural and national identity at a level of emotive meaning more basic and fundamental than other kinds of political affiliations.

The Sangh Parivar and its allies, though earlier known as orthodox, are changing its colour day by day. They have used media/social media in a big way to spread their messages. They imbibed within its structure the new elements and arguments produced by 21st century democracy and modernity alongside Hindu traditions. The Hindutva forces are attempting to frame narratives, reinterpret Indian civilization, and cultivate a public culture of Hindutva that touches the hearts of common people. Politics has now become a game of power through framing narratives, which may be derived from religion, identity, security and development.

In conclusion, from the second decade of the 21st century, rather than imaging an inclusive, secular society, there is a growing emphasis on promoting India as a Hindu Rashtra which challenges the secular fabric of the Indian nation. While the foundation of Indian nationalism was people, inclusiveness and secularism; however, the contemporary scenario undergoes many changes due the entry of religion-based discourse in politics. Accordingly, these changes trouble many who are concerned about the contemporary nationalist discourse in India.

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## **Achieving Sustainable Development through Women Empowerment: A Journey of Hargila Baideu in Assam**

**Nayana Teron  
Dulen Hazarika**

### **Abstract**

*Women play a dynamic role in sustainable development, with their contributions to environmental protection being particularly noteworthy. The present study investigates the intersecting dynamics of environmental conservation and empowerment of women through the lens of the 'Hargila Baideu's biodiversity conservation initiative in Assam, India. 'Hargila' the Greater Adjutant Stork, serves as a focal point for this study due to its critical endangered status and its significance in the ecosystem. A qualitative research approach has been adopted to delve into the multifaceted strategies employed to protect and preserve the 'Hargila' population and uplift the socio-economic status of women in the region. Through in-depth interviews, observation, and secondary data investigation, the study elucidates the various dimensions of women's participation in conservation efforts and the resulting impacts on their empowerment, livelihoods, and community resilience. Findings of the study suggest that the integration of women into conservation initiatives contributes to biodiversity conservation and fosters sustainable development by enhancing gender equality, economic opportunities, and community engagement. The research pays to the growing discourse on the relationship between environmental conservation and women's empowerment contribute insights for Government, policymakers, conservation practitioners, and researchers striving for holistic approaches to sustainable development.*

**Key Words:** Sustainable Development, Women Empowerment, Environmental Conservation, Hargila and Assam.

### **Introduction**

Over last 50 years, ecosystems have degraded more than ever in human civilization. This has certain direct and indirect consequences on human well-being. Globally, the well-being of present and future human populations depends on ecologically sustainable and socially equitable ways of living. Sustainable development is very significant concept to achieve growth

in a country as well as maintain the environmental balance to reduce resource exploitation from nature. We already know that without economic development a country cannot rise properly and economic development of a country or a state mainly depends upon natural resources. Excess exploitation of resources due to rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization is the major cause of environmental degradation. And this kind of destruction on environment is a major threat to sustainable development.

Subsequent to the 'Brundtland Report's publication, 'sustainable development' emerged as the predominant framework within the environmental movement, leading to a significant expansion in related literature (UN, 1987).

Sustainable development requires just distribution of resources for both the present and the forthcoming generation. It is impossible to reach without ensuring gender equality. Women's empowerment is essential to long term success in all areas of development, including the economy, society and the environment (Smith, 2020, p.112). To meet the requirements of the present without compromising the potential of future generation is an overarching definition of sustainable development. This is the crux of eco-friendly progress. All policies and initiatives must prioritize sustainable development, aiming to build a society grounded in principles of freedom, democracy, and the protection of fundamental rights. This involves promoting equality of opportunity and fostering solidarity within and across generations. Whatever the ultimate purpose of the policies and activities, this must be the case (Baker, 2019, p.24)

The cornerstone for sustainable development should be a high standard of education and social growth, as well as high standard of environmental protection and improvement. This should be based on a social market economy that is highly competitive and aims to achieve full employment, as well as on balanced and stable economic growth (Brown, 2021, p.321). All national policies should have their major goals to promote sustainable development, which in turn seeks to improve the quality of the life on the world for the present and the future generation. It is about ensuring the planet can sustain a wide variety of living forms much into the future. It is based on democratic principles, the rule of law, and the recognition and protection of individual liberties and the right to equal opportunity. It promotes unity not only within given age but also across generations. It aspires to cultivate a thriving economy marked by ample employment opportunities and robust educational systems, alongside prioritizing healthcare, social cohesion, territorial harmony, and environmental conservation. This vision

extends to fostering a peaceful and secure global community that cherishes the diverse contributions of all cultures. (ECLAC, 2012).

### **Women's Contribution to the Cause of Long-Term Sustainability**

Empowering is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional concept. Empowering means, to let women live their own life in a way they think appropriate according to their conditions, family circumstances, qualities and capabilities of which they themselves are the best judges. In recent decades, the issues of women empowerment, gender equality, gender rights and equal opportunities have been getting very much popularity in each and every country of the globe as a major goal to sustainable development. The international treaties and agreements have been giving so much importance to these issues. These international declarations have been promoting several women empowerment programmes and also suggest all its signatory countries to make policies for women empowerment and sustainability. International agreements like: 'Rio declaration on Environment and Development (1992)', 'The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)', 'The United Nation Conference on Sustainable Development (2012)', gave a special concern to Women empowerment and gender rights. The 'United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development' entitled 'The future we want' stated that:

*"We recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision making ..... We underscore that women have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. We recognize the leadership role of women, and we resolve to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and to ensure their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels". (Assembly, 2012)*

'The world Commission on Environment and Development' published a study in 1988 titled "our common future", which linked the environment problem to unsustainable progress or development and fiscal practices that were widening the 'North-South gap' and making womenfolk the mainstream of the world's poor and uneducated population (WCED, 1988). Despite setbacks, women have persisted in their efforts to promote policies and practices that are safe for the physical and mental health of the future generations (WCED, 1988). In almost

every country, women constitute a disproportionate part of the poor population. Environment degradation and population affect both urban and rural areas, and studies show that the poor in both wealthy and developing countries face the brunt of these problems. This is so in both city and country life.

According to a report by the 'United Nations Environment Programme' (UNEP, 2004), women bear the primary responsibility for household management, childcare, and dietary needs across the globe. Moreover, they play crucial roles in environmental regulation, particularly in poorer nations, where they are actively involved in agriculture, animal care, and the gathering of water and fuel. Despite their significant contributions, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making processes related to the environment and development, both at the local and global levels. This disparity persists, despite the evident importance of women's perspectives and experiences in these domains. Women are increasingly vocal about the need for their voices to be heard and their insights to be integrated into policy discussions, recognizing the intricate connections between political, economic, social, and environmental issues. They advocate for a holistic approach to sustainable development that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of these challenges (UNEP, 2004)

### **Green Guardians: Nurturing Earth's Resources**

In almost all third-world countries, women use and manage natural resources like land and forests more than men do (Smith et al., 2019, p.321). Women in rural areas of impoverished nations dedicate a significant portion of their time to activities such as agriculture, wood gathering, cooking, and water transportation. (UN, 2021). Across most of Asia and Africa and especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, women are the backbone of the agricultural economy (WB, 2018). They are thus responsible for maintaining fertile soil and deciding which seeds, fertilizers and insecticides will be utilized to grow plants from seed (FAO, 2016). Women are not just users but also consumers, protectors and managers of biodiversity. When it comes to the land and its resources, indigenous women have a special relationship with it. To ensure that future generations can meet their needs, their practices and traditions emphasize the importance of wisely managing, conserving and making use of the natural resources at their disposal (Gonzalez, 2018, p.78). However, most contemporary development projects do not consider the needs of or respect the traditions of indigenous peoples (Smith & Johnson, 2020, p.210).

To understand the relationship of women and environment, the study investigates the dynamics of environmental conservation and women's empowerment through the lens of the Hargila Baideu's initiatives in Assam, India. Dr Purnima Devi Barman has been honoured with several national and international awards for her biodiversity conservation action. She is a wildlife biologist from Assam, has been recognized with the prestigious Whitley Gold Award often referred to as the 'Green Oscar', for her exemplary conservation efforts for protecting the endangered Greater Adjutant Stork and its wetland habitat (PTI 2024).

### **The Journey of Hargila Baideu in Assam**

Dr. Purnima Devi Barman, known as "Hargila baideu," meaning stork sister, has dedicated over a decade to conservation efforts aimed at protecting the endangered greater adjutant stork in Assam, India. Recognizing the critical role of local communities, particularly women, in conservation, Dr. Barman has actively engaged and empowered them to safeguard the stork's habitat. Amidst threats like habitat destruction and loss of nesting trees, her collaborative approach involves educating and mobilizing women to become stewards of the environment. Through community-led initiatives and awareness campaigns, she has inspired a grassroots movement for the preservation of the greater adjutant stork (UNEP, 2022). Dr. Barman's work exemplifies the transformative impact of grassroots involvement and underscores the importance of inclusive conservation efforts in safeguarding biodiversity and preserving fragile ecosystems.

Dr. Barman was recognised as 'Champion of the Earth' for Entrepreneurial Vision for 2022 by the 'United Nations Environment Programme' (UNEP 2022). At a young age, she discovered her lifelong passion for the endangered greater adjutant stork. Growing up on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in Assam, India, Barman found solace and inspiration in the company of her grandmother, a farmer, who introduced her to the rich diversity of the region. Through her grandmother's guidance, Barman developed an intimate connection with the natural world, particularly with the majestic storks that visited the wetlands and paddy fields nearby. Immersed in bird songs and teachings about local wildlife, she nurtured a profound love for these creatures from a young age. This early bond sparked her journey as a wildlife biologist, dedicated to the conservation of the greater adjutant stork, now one of the rarest stork species

globally. Dr. Barman's unwavering commitment to protecting these birds exemplifies the transformative power of passion and connection in environmental advocacy.

### **Decline of a Species**

*“I saw storks and many other species. She taught me bird songs. She asked me to sing for the egrets and the storks. I fell in love with the birds. When I started research with these storks for my Ph.D. program, I spotted very few storks compared to the large numbers I had seen as a child, growing up in rural Assam”* said by Dr. Barman (Nath 2020)

The population of greater adjutant storks has plummeted to less than 1,200 mature individuals today, representing less than 1 percent of their numbers a century ago. As per the Red List of Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, there exist merely 800 to 1,200 mature birds globally, with the majority concentrated in Assam. (Birdlife 2016). This stark decline is primarily attributed to the destruction of their natural habitat. Wetlands, vital ecosystems for these storks, have suffered from drainage, pollution, and degradation, often supplanted by urban infrastructure such as buildings, roads, and telecommunication towers as rural areas undergo rapid urbanization. Despite nurturing diverse flora and fauna, wetlands are vanishing at a rate three times quicker than forests worldwide, largely because of human activities and the impacts of global warming (Birdlife 2016).

Furthermore, the Indian population of the greater adjutant stork faces additional threats, including the contamination of open rubbish dumps where pollutants, carcasses, and foodstuffs are disposed of together. There is also a risk of accidental ingestion of polythene bags when food is wrapped inside (Birdlife 2016). In Cambodia, the poisoning of small wetlands to catch fish poses a significant threat to the species. Pesticide use at open rubbish dumps in Guwahati, India, has resulted in several stork mortalities (Birdlife 2016). These various threats underscore the urgent need for comprehensive conservation measures to safeguard the greater adjutant stork from further decline.

### **The ‘Hargila Army’**

The bird greater adjutant stork ‘*Leptoptilos dubius*’ locally known as ‘Hargila’. In Assamese ‘Hargila’ means “bone swallower” (Nath 2020). In her efforts to safeguard the stork, Barman recognized the necessity of altering perceptions surrounding the bird. To achieve this goal, she rallied a team of village women to join her in this endeavor. She formed the “Hargila Army” a



dedicated and passionate group consists of over 10,000 women who committed to the conservation of the greater adjutant stork. Their efforts to protect nesting sites, rehabilitate injured storks, and celebrate the arrival of newborn chicks through "baby showers" are commendable (UNEP 2022). It's inspiring to see such local initiatives making a real difference in wildlife conservation.

The cultural significance of the greater adjutant stork, as reflected in its presence in folk songs, poems, festivals, and plays, highlights the deep connection between communities and their natural environment (Purnima Devi Barman 2020). This cultural appreciation can serve as a powerful tool for raising awareness about the importance of conservation and rallying support for the protection of these magnificent birds and their habitats. The Hargila Army's work not only benefits the greater adjutant stork but also contributes to the overall health and biodiversity of the ecosystem. Their efforts are a testament to the positive impact that local communities can have on wildlife conservation when they come together with passion and determination.

Purnima Devi Barman's initiative to provide women with weaving looms and yarn to create and sell textiles decorated with motifs of the 'hargila' is truly innovative and impactful. Not only does this entrepreneurship spread awareness of the bird, but it also empowers women economically and socially. By creating and selling textiles adorned with hargila motifs, these women are not only showcasing the beauty of the bird but also leveraging their traditional skills to generate income (UNEP 2022). This economic independence not only improves their livelihoods but also instills a sense of pride and ownership in their work to save the stork. It's a wonderful example of how conservation efforts can intersect with socio-economic development, benefiting both wildlife and communities.

Furthermore, by incorporating 'hargila' motifs into their textiles, these women are perpetuating the cultural significance of the greater adjutant stork, further reinforcing its importance in local traditions and identity. Her approach was to integrate science, tradition, outreach and participation (Barman 2020). This holistic approach to conservation, which integrates economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental protection, is key to ensuring sustainable outcomes for both people and wildlife.

Ever since Barman initiated her conservation efforts, there has been a significant surge in nest numbers across Dadara, Pachariya, and Singimari villages in Kamrup District. The count has escalated from 28 to over 250, establishing this region as the foremost breeding ground for

greater adjutant storks worldwide. (UNEP 2022). The increase in local numbers from just 30 hargilas in 2008 to over 200 now is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the effectiveness of conservation efforts led by the Hargila army (Barman 2020). From 2017 Barman has been building 'tall bamboo nesting platforms' for the endangered birds to hatch their eggs. These platforms provide safe and suitable nesting sites for the birds, helping to address the loss of natural habitat and nesting sites due to urbanization and human activities. Her such initiatives were rewarded a couple of years later when the first greater adjutant stork chicks were hatched on these experimental platforms.

The successful efforts of the 'Hargila army' proved that women can be a major key role player in conserving biodiversity. But it is unfortunate that women are often left behind from decision making process. Barman Holds that women have great knowledge about the species and can be their voices. Gender discrimination can be a significant obstacle and she urges to breakdown the stereotypes that hold them back. Gender inequality is as important as the fact that the world faces a crisis of biodiversity. To end this exploitation, women should empower themselves and sustain nature and their own special identity. She motivated the women by sharing discrimination stories she had experienced in her life and highlighted that nature has given immense power to survive and overcome the limitations which harm women and nature as well (Barman 2020). Emphasizing the connection between women and nature as "nature's children" highlights the inherent bond and responsibility that women have towards protecting the environment. By recognizing and embracing this connection, women can play a crucial role in sustaining both nature and their own unique identities.

### **Conclusion:**

Barman's endeavors serve as a compelling illustration of how individual action can enact tangible change in safeguarding endangered species and their habitats. Through unwavering dedication, innovative approaches, and community involvement, she has not only contributed to the preservation of the greater adjutant stork but also holds broader implications for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the area. Raising children with a sense of care and responsibility for the use and protection of natural resources is an important

component of a mother's role as a socializer and educator. However, there remains a pressing need to ensure women's full participation in the "green economy" and to prioritize their perspectives in environmental policy-making processes. Expanding the scope of training and capacity-building initiatives tailored to women's needs is imperative. Furthermore, dismantling socio-cultural and religious norms that constrain women's roles in households, communities, and society is essential to empower them as agents of sustainable development.

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## **Borderlines of Exclusion: A Study of the Marginalisation of Deori Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh**

**Lob Singh**

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### **Abstract**

*Drawing and re-drawing of political boundaries has resulted in the marginalisation of various communities living across national and sub-national border regions. Multiple examples of such communities can be located within India's northeast, which has historically experienced a series reorganisation of boundaries. This paper, in light of Janet Mancini Billson's (2005) 'Structural marginality,' offers an illustrative account of the residential problem and socio-political marginalisation of the Deori tribe residing in Arunachal Pradesh along its border with Assam. This paper attempts to understand why the narratives of these communities sharply contrast with mainstream perspectives on residential issues, and it further investigates their strategies for adaptation to borderland conditions and resistance against marginalisation.*

**Keywords:** Deori, Borderlines, Exclusion, Marginal Communities, Dominant Narrative

### **Introduction**

The Border-making process tends to perpetuate exclusionary practices, which may result in the marginalisation of certain groups or communities (Newman 2011; Trudeau and MaMorran 2011; 446). The effects of such bordering processes are evident in the study of Noboru Ishikawa (2009); he found that the demarcation and evolution of the border between Indonesian Borneo and Malaysian Sarawak have led to marginalisation of the Telok Melano community. Border not only demarcates space but also separates the groups by the symbolic binary of 'us' and 'them,' emphasising differences and creating a sense of separation within and beyond the border. Within a given physical border, the social process of 'othering' separates certain communities from the collective whole (broader group) and are perceived as 'outsiders' living 'inside' (Newman 2003, 14). Trudeau and McMorran (2011) have argued that marginalisation may arise from various differences, emphasising the

binary of 'us' and 'them.' This exclusion led marginalisation is often institutionalised by state apparatus and structures to prioritise the interests of the dominant group, i.e., 'we', at the expense of marginalising the minorities, i.e., 'others,' as highlighted by Betemariam A. Tulu and Ameyu G. Roro (2022) in their case study of the Oromo community in Ethiopia.

The notion of marginalisation has been conceptualised and theorized differently by different scholars, thus making it a multidimensional, multi-casual, and multilayered phenomenon. Marginalisation, for the purpose of this study, is defined based on Janet Mancini Billson's (2005) concept of structural marginality as a process through which a group or community is socially, economically, and politically excluded and neglected due to how institution and structure operate, where the individuals or groups who are marginalised find themselves disenfranchised, disadvantaged, and outside the existing system of protection, integration, and access to opportunities, resources, and means of subsistence (Gurung 2007, 9; Bilson 1988, 185).

Transformation of Arunachal Pradesh from frontier to agency to union territory and then to a state involved strategic reconfiguration of space and spatiality. During the state-making exercise in the 1950s, particular emphasis was placed on delineating the external border of Assam as the internal border of Arunachal Pradesh or the erstwhile Northeast Frontier Tracts. This process included readjustment and inclusion of certain regions on Assam mainland to rationalize administrative convenience and geographic contiguity and accommodate ethno-territorial aspirations. Certain tribal hill plains inhabited by certain communities, such as Deori, Mishing, etc., were assimilated into the Assam mainland. This resulted in the minority status of the populations left out within Arunachal Pradesh, leading to their subsequent socio-political marginalisation.

Deori as one of such border communities shares a similar experience of socio-political marginalisation within Arunachal Pradesh, and this paper thus aims to examine their residential challenges and socio-political marginalisation within Arunachal Pradesh. This paper also attempts to understand why the narratives of this community sharply contrast with mainstream perspectives on residential issues, and it further investigates their strategies for adaptation to borderland conditions and resistance against marginalisation.

### **Deori: Locating Marginality in their History and Social Identity.**

To understand the present discourse surrounding the residential and socio-political status of Deoris, one has to refer to the social identity and settlement of Deoris in the region.

### Deori: Who are They?

The Deoris, who proudly call themselves as Jimo-Chhayan (the children of the sun and the moon), ethnically belong to the Tibeto Barman Mongoloid tribe. According to Asim Maitra, 'The word Deori is articulated in two syllables, "deo" meaning "god" and "ri" meaning "worshipper," which literally stands for 'worshipper of god.' (1995, 156). In the Hema-kosh, the Assamese to English dictionary, Deori denotes an officer of a temple who distributes consecrated food to the people. According to the chronicles, a Deori priest instilled life into a lebado (goat) made of iron offered by a Chutiya king to verify the supernatural power of the priest. Amazed by the priest's deed, the Chutiya king named the Deoris as Deori-Chutiya since they were living in his kingdom as the official priestly class of the Chutiya Kingdom (Saikia 1976; Maitra 1995, 159).

Deori trace their origin to a mythological story of Girachi-Gira (Bura-Buri in Assamese), who were created by the god Kundimama. The couple gave birth to a son named Bolialialia or Pichandama and a daughter named Pishasi or Kechakhati or Tameshwari. The Dibongiyas originated from Bura-Buri, the Tengapaniyas from Boliababa, and the Borgoniya from Tameshwari (Bisht and Bankoti 2004, 354).

A slight change has been reported in individual naming. Previously, they used to suffix only the community name, but now they have started suffixing the clan name along with the community name. The community is governed by a well-constituted village council, locally known as Mel. The senior most male member of every household of every clan is a member of the Mel. The council settles all kinds of disputes and maintains law and order in the village. The government representatives i.e. gaonburah, collects house tax, keeps records of births and deaths, and communicates the directives of the circle officer to the villagers.

The Deoris treat all their neighbors on equal terms, but the Hindu caste groups (Brahmins, Kalitas, and Morans) consider the Deoris low in social standing. Deoris have adopted many aspects of the Hindu way of life. However, their temples have no idol or image of any deity. Harak, Bhimidi, Rajkema, Bhohog, and Basak Bihu are the community's main annual festivals. The community has traditional links with the Chutiyas, Khamptis, Kacharis, Adis, and Mishmis through language, the communal norms, marital alliances, rituals, and festivals. They exchange food, drinks, and water with almost all tribal communities, and this inter-community linkages unites them with the Khamptis, Singhphos, Kacharis, and Mishmis. They are also linked with the Kacharis, Ahoms, Adis, and Kalitas through martial alliances. The Deoris and Khamptis for example, are linked by a



ritual-based friendship called mita-miti. Khamptis also utilize the services of the Deori priests, some of whom worship at the temple of Boliababa.

Land and forests are the major economic resources of the community. The Deoris are settled agriculturists; usually grow paddy and all types of vegetables. Fishing, hunting and weaving are the subsidiary occupations. The Deori people are also proficient in the crafts of weaving, wood carving and basket making.

### Deoris: How did they Settle in the Region?

It is said that their original abode was in the Sona or Huna Hills near the Himalayas. In the course of time, they came down to Jairam near Sadiya and settled on the banks of the Dibang, Tengapani, and Patarsal rivers in the Lohit district (Maitra 1995, 156). According to William Barclay Brown, 'the original seat of the Deoris was in the region beyond Sadiya. It is only about a century ago that they removed them to their present settlements, but some of them still occasionally visit Sadiya for religious purposes' (1895, 36).

When the Ahoms defeated the Chutias, most of the Deoris shifted from the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh to Assam along with the others (Chutias). They were not harmed by the Ahoms, rather, they were allowed to continue to worship as usual. The Deoris kept themselves aloof from the others, or others looked at them in separate ways, which helped them to retain their traditional culture.

According to Dutta, 'When Ahom invaded Assam in 1223 AD, Deoris followed them and got settled in many parts of Assam. During the British period, a few Deoris accompanied the British authority officials on timber affairs at the bank of the Neo-Dihing River in the Namsang area. They came to know about the location and decided to settle at the site of undivided Assam (at present, Lekang Circle of Arunachal Pradesh). These families were followed by more families from different parts of Assam' (2006, 447-48). There were several springs, ponds, and rivulets along with fertile flat lands, but in the year 1992-93, the flood water of the Neo-Dihing River damaged the whole area; most of the ponds and rivulets were filled up with mud, and some rivulets became widened and changed their respective normal courses. As a result before 1950, few families had initially settled in Mohadevpur. These families were followed by more families from different parts of the Assam. Presently, there are nine villages, namely Mohadevpur –I, Mohadevpur –II, Mohadevpur–III, Mohadevpur –IV, Mohang, Dagaba, Dirak, Dharampur, and Sonpoi. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Deoris are distributed with a population of 3608 (1944 males and 1664 females) according to the 1981 census (Tribe-wise

data are not available for recent censuses). Nowadays, the population of the Deoris in Assam stretches up to parts of North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, and Sonitpur districts.

### **Marginalisation of Deori**

The present socio-political status and marginalisation of the Deori community can be placed under two relative issues: first, their identity crisis, and second, the denial of their Permanent Residential Certificate (PRC), and Scheduled Tribe Certificate by the Arunachal government. At the level of identity, the issue could be understood as how the tribe is constantly being excluded and perceived as outsiders within the state. This narration of exclusion towards Deori by dominant Arunachali tribes has somewhere pushed the government to discontinue Scheduled tribe status and deny Permanent Residential certificates.

In following section, these issues will be discussed by highlighting the narratives and counter narratives between Deori and broader Arunachali communities over the former's demand of granting PRC and resuming the issuance of Scheduled Tribes certificate.

#### **Social Marginalisation: In Search of Arunachali Identity**

The fundamental question related to belonging and membership, i.e., who are they, essentially related to the question of where they originally belonged, shaped and reshaped the identities of Deoris in Arunachal Pradesh. The issue of identity crises of Deori and denial of Arunachali identity by other Arunachal tribes is deeply rooted and intertwined with the historical, geographical, and borderland dynamics.

Situated in the foothills between Assam and the erstwhile North East Frontier Tract, the spatial character of geography acted as a buffer and zone of constant cultural contacts and movements between the plains and the hills. Deori, who historically used to inhabit the foothills, exhibits typical socio-cultural attributes sharing close connections with the cultures of both the plains and the hills. As a result, their identity has been historically shaped as hybrid and distinct- neither fully belongs to the hill nor to the plain.

However, the subsequent ethno-federalism in the region has marginalised the Deori community. The border demarcation in 1873, in the form of the Inner Line, segregated tribal and non-tribal regions without due consideration for cultural continuity and borderland population. This was later reinforced by post-colonial governments to maintain ethno federalism, geographical congruence, and administrative convenience,

resulting in two separate jurisdictions. This separation has significantly contributed to the identity crisis among Deoris as their population was divided into two states- Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The paradox of the division is that they could neither fully establish their identity as Arunachal nor claim their distinct identity as Deori.

With the delineation of clear state boundaries, the necessity for Deori to align themselves with either Arunachal or Assam to obtain citizenship and benefits became important. Consequently, this led to the emergence of two contrasting narratives within the same community. Deori living on the Assam side identify themselves as Assamese or plain tribe recounting their settlement histories and relationship with the Chutia kingdom. On the other hand, those living in Arunachal Pradesh assert their identity as an indigenous hill or Arunachali tribe, emphasising histories of migration and reverse migration to justify their aboriginality to the hills. This dichotomy of identities has eroded their distinct original identity and pushed the tribe to identity crises in the search for a dominant state identity.

Furthermore, Deori have historical and cultural continuity with the plains as a result despite of residing within Arunachal Pradesh, they are perceived and treated as outsiders or non Arunachali tribe by the dominant Arunachali narrative. The State government acting on the popular narrative has denied citizenship, residential, and ST status to the tribe.

#### Political Marginalisation: Denied PRC and ST Status

The major issue pertaining to the marginalisation of the Deori tribe in Arunachal Pradesh is a denial of the Permanent Resident Certificate and Scheduled Tribe status by the state. In February 2019, there was a huge hue and cry over the Pema Khandu, (Chief Minister) and Chowna Mein's (Deputy Chief Minister) announcement of issuing Permanent Resident Certificates (PRC) to members of the Ahom, Adivasi, Kachari, Moran, Sonowal, Deori and Mishong communities living in Changlang and Namsai districts. After four days of violence, the Government was compelled to scrap the PRC matter.

PRC is a government-issued document that provides domicile to a person in the state and enables a person to obtain a certain domicile-specific quota in educational institutions and job opportunities. PRC is closely linked with the status of Scheduled tribes in the state; the aboriginal Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes are the main holders of PRC in the state. The PRC and ST certificate is essential documentary proof of where one

belongs, one's membership, who is legal and who is illegal, who is native, and who is non-native. In the state of Arunachal Pradesh, possession of ST and PRC is essential for full participation in society and access to jobs, resources, etc.

The Deori tribe living in Arunachal Pradesh has been categorically denied ST and PRC by the state, referring to them as outsiders and non-Arunachali tribes. The refusal to acknowledge their indigenous status undermines their equal access to education, employment, and socio-political representation in terms of availing reservation and quota, reducing the Deori people to second-class citizenship. This denial also affects their land rights, as they are unable to prove their permanent domicile status in the state. P.C. Hirak Chang said, 'denial of ST and PRC has led to existential crises and day to day predicament among the indigenous non-recognized ethnic tribes in the states' (Mising 2017). President of the Deori Tribal Welfare Association, Mr. Bhaubneswar Deori, while highlighting the current situations and problems faced by Deori youth, said, 'The ignorance was started from last 40 years; Deori children were barred from issuing three books and school dresses then restriction in school hostels after that withdrawal of ST in the year 1991 and now by stopping PRC' (Deori Youth Club 2013).

Historically, the Deori people were recognized as Scheduled Tribes until 1990, with certificates issued by district deputy commissioners affirming their status. However, in 1993, the state of Arunachal Pradesh denied issuance of ST certificate to Deori, citing Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Union Territories) Order 1951-referring to Arunachal Pradesh-lays down only 12 tribes, which doesn't explicitly mention Deori as Scheduled Tribe (Debananda Deori v. State of Arunachal Pradesh 1997).

This denial has been fully supported by the dominant majority in Arunachal Pradesh, who argue that the Deori are migrants from Assam and not indigenous hill tribes. The Arunachali majority raises concerns about preserving their cultural identity and spatial composition. APST population apprehended that granting these certificates to the Deori and other non-tribal communities would open the floodgate for the influx, which would eventually turn the meager Arunachali population into a minority and lead to their deprivation and extinction as well ("The PRC Issue" 2019). There are fears that easy access to PRC for non-tribal communities may result in demographic shifts, impacting the exclusive land rights, traditional way of life, and cultural heritage of Arunachal Pradesh (Deka 2019).

They further argue that granting ST certificates to the Deori and other communities could lead to dilution of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873 and subsequent Inner Line Permit (ILP) rule, aimed at safeguarding tribal lands and culture by segregating tribal and non tribal (“The PRC Issue” 2019).

The concerns of safeguarding the interest of APSTs and apprehension of losing their distinct identity is clearly reflect in the statements of different political leaders and student unions in the state. The recent protests and violence occurred in February 2019 highlights the deep sentiments and apprehensions surrounding the issue.

On the other hand, the Deori people assert the Scheduled Tribe and PRC status as birthright, claiming to be the indigenous and aboriginal tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The Economic and social backwardness of the tribe due to the social and political exclusions since 1990 has compelled the community to demand full recognition and inclusion. Thus, they vehemently opposed the dominant narrative, asserting their aboriginality by referring to historical evidence such as census reports, land allotments, and political appointments dating back to pre-independence times. Historical evidences, such as the appointment of Gaun Buras in 1951 by a political officer of Sadiya and land allotment to Deori families by the Political Officer of NEFA in 1944, are provided as proof their presence in the area (Arunachal Today 2022). Census reports from 1961 to 1991 consistently listed Deori as one of the ST tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, further validating their indigenous status (Debananda Deori v. State of Arunachal Pradesh 1997). Likewise, they argue that the Constitution (ST) order 1950 amended in 1956, kept the social status of Deori as Scheduled Tribes. Furthermore, Deoris claims that they have been living in the present places since time immemorial and that their original settlement was beyond Sadiya, which is to be present Jairam. They first originally settled in the hills, but later, at the outset of the Burmese invasion, due to security and better living, they migrated to the plains and settled there. However, there are still some villages in the Namsai and Changlang districts (Arunachal Today 2022).

Countering the identification of the Deori as outsiders, RRAG director Suhas Chakma stated, ‘Lakhimpur Frontier Tract had been the homeland of the Deori and other communities; Changlang and Namsai districts were carved out of Tirap and Lohit respectively, which were originally part of Lakhimpur district of Assam and later added to NEFT. Therefore, identification of the people from the erstwhile Lakhimpur district as outsiders based on current boundaries of the districts on the state is wrong’ (“Deori, Kachari, Moran and Missing communities” 2019).

### Counter Resistance to Marginalisation

The denial of equal citizenship and status has been vehemently opposed by the Deori to resist marginalisation. Betemariam A. Tulu and Ameyu G. Roro, argued that for a social movement to emerge, there must be certain structural strains, such as socio-political and economic grievances, to make people or a group dissatisfied enough to mobilize for a social movement and resistance (2002, 7). Deori who are denied Scheduled tribe status and PRC in Arunachal Pradesh marked a typical institutional marginalisation that reduced the Deori tribe into a fractured community, deprived of equal rights and access to social and political opportunities vis a vis to their other Arunachali counterparts. This deprivation and marginalisation have mobilised the Deori people and community to come together to demand denied rights and resist the process of exclusion.

Deori community, despite their powerless social-political status both in terms of number and position, has consistently advocated for the rights and recognition within the state, which includes two major demands: first, issuance of PRC, and second, Scheduled Tribe status in the state.

One of noteworthy aspect of resistance to exclusion is their organised efforts by forming alliance with various other associations and organisations. To strengthen and solidify their movement, Deori associations and people formed alliances with other similar deprived communities in Arunachal Pradesh, such as Mishing, Moran, Kahari, etc. These communities individually are numerically weak and minority in the state; thus, coming together under one banner brought a new strength in terms of numbers. These communities together have demanded PRC and ST status in different forums and also called for bandhs and protests to pressurise government.

Likewise, Deori in Arunachal Pradesh strategically leveraged their cultural continuity beyond Arunachal Pradesh to pressure the government. It has maintained strong trans-border communication and associations with other associations in India such as All India Tribal Welfare Association, All India Deori Youth and Student Association etc.

Futhermore, other associations like All Arunachal Pradesh Tribal Welfare Association and All Arunachal Pradesh Deori Welfare Association have shown solidarity to the demands of the community and have been at the forefront in raising voice against their marginalisation. These associations, through different meetings, press briefings, and memoranda, have consistently appealed to the state government to accept the demands of

the community. They have also provided various historical evidences to prove the presence and indigenous identity of Deori in Arunachal Pradesh. Along with these appeals and pleas, these organisations often launch movements, bandhs, etc., to lobby against the delay and pessimistic attitude of the government.

### **Conclusion**

The current status of Deori in Arunachal Pradesh is, to a great extent, associated with the creation of borderlines at two levels: at the geographical level, i.e., demarcation of the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and at the social level, i.e., symbolic boundary dividing ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ These borderlines have turned the tribe into a fractured and stateless community in Arunachal Pradesh with social and political exclusion. The community at the social level is constantly being labeled as ‘outsiders,’ and the state apparatus is echoing dominant narratives denied PRC and ST to them. In addition, some of the dominant tribes have developed a negative attitude of superiority to the tribe, which has resulted in the feeling of relative deprivation. Marginalisation of Deoris in Arunachal Pradesh is a persistent issue despite India’s democratic promise of inclusive development. Arunachal is a ‘land of possibility,’ and to translate this into reality requires dominant tribes to share additional responsibility to ensure that in our collective onward march to take special care of our own brethren, whose voices have remained unheard so far.

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## **Indigenous Knowledge System and Sustainable Practices of the Traditional Lepcha Community of West Bengal**

**John Kapil Chettri**

### **Abstract**

*Indigenous knowledge system, culture and practices are rooted not just in environment and ecological protection, but environmental sustainability as well. Development brought forth by the modern understanding of Knowledge has mitigated the benefits and traditional competence of tribal economy; sustainable usage of natural landscape and the age old practice of sustainability. The acknowledgement of this has been a growing phenomenon all over the world and inward looking into our own indigenous societies has been but an attempt to find answers to protection, conservation and even sustainable consumption that these indigenous societies have seemed so, seamlessly interwoven into the very fabric of their society and their existence. This paper, attempts to unveil, as to how Indigenous Knowledge systems lead to sustainable practices. In doing so, it focuses on indigenous knowledge and traditional practices of Lepcha tribal community, and how it treads its own unique path of environmental sustainability. Lastly, emphasising on why knowing, understanding and preserving such practices are crucial in our project of a sustainable world.*

Keywords: Sustainability, Environment, conservation, indigenous practices, culture, Lepcha.

### **1. Indigenous Knowledge (IK)**

Although there is no single definition of IK and many scholars and platforms have defined and redefined it in numerous and varied manner. World Bank (2003) defines it as ‘the large body of knowledge, skill and experiences that has developed outside the formal education system which

people apply to maintain, improve and sustain their livelihood.’ Another definition views IK as ‘the traditional knowledge of the local community existing within and developed around the specific conditions of men and women indigenous to a particular geographical area’ (Grenier 1998,32), Whereas, Basu (2009) views, ‘Indigenous Knowledge is found in people’s memories and activities which are expressed in the form of stories , songs belief system, rituals, folklores, community laws, local language, cultural values, agricultural practices, material objects, plants species and animal breeds.’

A plethora of definition on Indigenous Knowledge is available, which is defined from the perspective of cultural, political and ecological studies. The definition which is comprehensive is given by Battiste:

*‘Indigenous knowledge is an extensive and valuable knowledge system. According to the categories used by Eurocentric knowledge, it is transcultural (or intercultural) and interdisciplinary source of knowledge that embraces the context of about twenty per cent of the world’s population. Indigenous knowledge is systemic, covering both what can be observed and what can be thought. It comprises the rural and the urban, the settled and the nomadic, original inhabitants and migrants [...] Indigenous knowledge comprises all knowledge pertaining to a particular people and its territory, the nature or use of which has been transmitted from generation to generation [...] Indigenous Knowledge is an adaptive, dynamic system based on skills, abilities and problem-solving techniques that change over time depending on environmental conditions’ (Battiste 2005,4-6).*

However, IK has been viewed with skepticism in the West. ‘IK have been viewed as primitive, folkloric, anecdotal, unscientific, amethodological, insignificant and lacking scientific rigor and objectivity’ (Hobson 1992,24 and Grenier 1998,198), as such western centric education have often undervalued Indigenous Knowledge and subscribed to the view that nonwestern cultures

‘contribute nothing to the development of knowledge, humanities, arts, science and technology’ (Hobson 192, 23), which Marie Battiste call it “Cognitive Imperialism” (9).

Modern Knowledge system propagating logic and empirical science refute and consider the indigenous traditions and worldviews to be incapable of legitimate materialistic worldview of empiricism, science, logic and reason (Knopf, 180). They ‘speak the truth in a void,’ as they do not follow the principles of the western Cartesian-Newtonian ‘discursive policy’ they are not considered to be ‘*true*’ within the mainstream discourse (Foucault 1971, 17).

### 1.1 Shadowing of the Indigenous Knowledge System

Foucault in his enunciation of his idea of the Discourse has effectively demonstrated the interconnection of knowledge and power in western societies. Perusing knowledge, the ‘will to truth,’ conceals the will to power and discourses through scholarship and society turns agencies of power. Their formation is ‘at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures’ (Foucault 1971, 8), that manifest them a ‘system of exclusion (historic, modifiable, institutionally constraining)’ (Foucault 1971, 10). These exclusionary systems overwhelmingly resort on institution of public instruction and their practices: Instruction, print and publishing, libraries, laboratories and various methods of dissemination (Foucault 1971, 11). Then the discourse is simultaneously, the agent and subject of control, fettered and excluded and the scholarship and scientific disciplines are regulatory devices of discourse and power. As per their formula or ‘rules of exclusion’ that function with dichotomies; self-otherisation, neo/colonial, the division of valid and invalid, progressive or advanced from traditional, scientific and logical from unscientific and irrational knowledge and methodology. Thus, they have created a profoundly paramount, western Cartesian –Newtonian worldview and fortified and disseminated it through the academic scholarship which priorities, knowledge rooted in logic, science and reason that are empirically inclined and exclude knowledge

especially the indigenous epistemologies that are associated and based on oral tradition, observational, speculation or even the spiritual.

## **1.2 Bringing Indigenous Knowledge System to light.**

‘Indigenous scholars discovered that indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge’ (Battiste 2005, 2). Kuokkanen (2007), mentions, the western scholarship has neglected and refuted Indigenous ontologies; as the whole structure of western understanding and its structure is formulated upon an assumption of a single intellectual tradition and episteme. This refutation of IK is also for scholars a form of structural racism with biased academic, racism, belief in superiority and exclusion. Defending IK, scholars like McGloin and his associates opine that, it is imperative to bring back the system of knowledge which has been dismissed from the fold of west centric episteme.

Interestingly, IK based and rooted in holism and relational world views, refutes categorization. Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete calls it ‘Native Science,’ which he defines, ‘it is a metaphor for a wide range of tribal processes of perceiving, thinking, acting and “coming to know” that have evolved through human experience with the natural world. Native science is born of a lived storied participation with the natural landscape...it is the collective heritage of human experience with the natural world.’(Knopf 2015, Cajete, 2-3). Scholars like Mihesuha and Wilson (2004), Alfred (2000) have suggested that the western scholarship should be indigenized by synthesising both the knowledge system in a holistic approach towards scientific research and changing the Eurocentric take on IK and making space in academic and scientific sphere where its values and knowledge is recognized and supported to overcome the limitations of Eurocentric hegemonies in discourse and educational system (Kuokkanen 2007, 142; Graham Smith in Kovach 88, 91-92). However, synthesising must be based on the “principle of respect, recognition, reciprocity and responsibility” (Knopf 2015; Kovach 2010; Wilson 2008). Again, the traditional and Indigenous knowledge system and practices are not always static, traditional and unconventional, but these are dynamic, innovative, changing and developing according to time; influenced by its

surrounding/ environment and technology and political developments. Thus, the Indigenous Knowledge system can also be dialectical ‘...where nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but all factors are influences impacting other elements of the system-as-a-whole’ (Freeman 1992, 10).

The IK are rooted in ‘spiritually based moral code that regulate Indigenous people’s interactions with and stewardship of the environment’ (Knopf 2015, 185). The Eurocentric science refutes, belief based worldviews of creation and differentiate between normative values of myth, folklore etc., with empirical reality. Indigenous world view combine this differences and contrasts and believes the natural environment, human beings, flora and fauna as co-existing equal beings (Johnson 1992). Western approach fails to understand and dismiss the indigenous spiritual explanation of such natural phenomenon, ‘...is that the spiritual explanation conceals conservation strategies and does not necessarily detract from the reality of a situation and the making of appropriate decision about the wise use of resources’ (Johnson 1992, 5).

## **2. Indigenous Knowledge System: manifesting sustainability**

Griggs and his associates have redefined ‘The Brundtland Report’ (1987) definition of sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding Earth’s life support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations depends.’ It has been studied from varied perspective including local development, poverty alleviation, conservation and different methods for community development and amelioration. (Raderschall 2020). Land and its natural resources previously under the constant care of the indigenous people began to erode due to unsustainable use in the name of progress and development (Kumi et al., 2014). These phenomenon was acknowledge globally, and protection to it was safeguarded by the Earth Summit and the UN General Assembly’s declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People, approved in 2007(UN Publication, 2018)

Indigenous people, protect some of the most vital biodiversity landscapes and habitats of our world. They are also responsible for world’s multilingualism and their cultural legacy which we all are proud of (Lyon et al, 2017). Indigenous people, ‘accounting for only about five per cent of

the global population, they efficiently manage roughly twenty per cent to twenty-five per cent of the Earth's land surface. This territory is home to eighty per cent of the world's biodiversity, as well as around forty per cent of all terrestrial protected areas and biologically intact landscape' (Sahoo et al.2022,9). Despite its central role in ecology and biodiversity conservation practices and initiative, Indigenous people have to overcome discrimination, seclusion, prejudices, violence and exploitation even forced to abandon their land and habitat which is sacrosanct to their whole way of life, including spiritual, material, cultural etc.; as a result extinction looms large upon these marginalized indigenous people and its knowledge system. Although the mainstream jeopardises indigenous people's resilience, on the contrary, they are successful to adapt through the practice and application of traditional knowledge which is interwoven with indigenous language and traditions (Feyerabend et al., 2004). Indigenous practices has always been cautious while using and managing natural resources; prioritising its conservation and continuity as they have been the 'true' practitioners of sustainable development. The indigenous practice of mitigation and adaptation with a thrust on furthering sustainable production and consumption rooted on traditional and ideals of reciprocity with nature is a way out to sustainability against excessive exploitation of environment.

It is irrefutable that the indigenous communities have abundant knowledge interwoven in their religion, cultures, social, and economic institutions which are 'key drivers' of poverty alleviation, livelihood, and sustainability (Boon & Hens, 2007). Ample studies in this field have undoubtedly suggested that the Indigenous Knowledge proves as a useful framework, practices and strategies that can 'serve as foundation for effective development process for restoring social, economic and environmental resilience of the world at large' (Dhall n.d, 58). IK is a fruit of long tested experience and experimental approach to sustainable development and assists in redefining developmental techniques in the field of health, agriculture, governance, resource management and wellbeing (Boon & Hens). They tend to be resource effective and efficient as they are more successful in conservation of natural resources than externally imposed initiatives and measures for resource management. (Aggrawal, 2008) In this background, the succeeding

section shall shed some light on some practical application of Indigenous knowledge and practices of Lepcha indigenous tribal community and its contribution to environment sustainability.

### **3. Lepchas: Traditional practices and Sustainability**

The sustainable development goals as such are profoundly linked to environment, ecosystem, and wellbeing and flourishing of indigenous communities. As our discussion proceeds on the significance of the indigenous people, their knowledge system and practices as an alternative to attain sustainability with minimum adverse impact we have to initiate to understand some of the traditional practices which can be improvised as a strategy towards inclusiveness and sustainable development. To better understand this, the author here takes the case of the Lepchas, their indigenous knowledge and practices which are found to be rooted in environmental sustainability. The Lepcha community is found to populate in the districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong of West Bengal, the state of Sikkim, including in the few eastern districts of Nepal. However, for our paper we shall be focusing only on those found in the two districts of West Bengal.

#### **3.1 The Lepchas**

The Lepchas are a small tribal community who are predominantly located in the Eastern Himalayas i.e. specifically in the hill districts of West Bengal namely, Kalimpong and Darjeeling, state of Sikkim, eastern districts of Nepal and in some pockets in Bhutan. The Lepcha tribe believes their home and origin to be Sikkim Himalayas (Gorer 1938, 35; Hermanns, 1954,107). Lepcha folklore and tradition ascribe '*Myel Lyang*' as a land of their origin on the shadow and neighborhood of the mighty Kanchenjunga or Khangchendzonga, consisting of Sikkim (including Kalimpong and Darjeeling) and Illam Hills now in Nepal. According to this folklore and tradition, the ancestors of the Lepchas '*Fodong-Theeng*' and '*Na-Jong-Nyu*' were created by their God '*Rum*' from the pristine snow of Mount Khangchendzonga which the Lepchas call it '*King-tsum-song-bu.*' (Hermanns 1954,107; Plaisier 2005, 7-19, Subba 2008,



250). Another folklore narrative '*Teusey Namthar*' accounts that the earth was created by supreme goddess '*Itbu Mu*' who created '*King-tsum-song-bu*', a sacred mountain and 'Lepcha' as the first and second progeny respectively as brothers.

The Lepchas we find also call themselves '*Mutanchi Rong Kup*' or '*Rong Kup*'. '*Rong*,' meaning 'peak' '*Mutanchi Rong Kup*' meaning '*Itbu Mu*' or 'beloved children of the snowy peak' or 'beloved children of Mother Nature and God' (Hermanns 1954, 107; Plaisier 2005, 7-19; Subba 2008, 250; Gurung & Lama 2004, 107) considers that the rich biodiversity and resources that they avail, springs from this hidden mystic land and are brought by birds, streams and river emanating from the sacred Khangchendzonga (Acharya 2017). Khangchendzonga and its surrounding landscape is very much imbibed in the very existence of this community and remains a continuous source of perennial influence that inspires and affects every aspect of Lepcha way of life.

### 3.2 Lepchas and their intertwined existence with nature

The Lepchas from an early age learn about their tribe's immemorial long connection with the nature; trees, animals, rivers and the landscape (*Myel Lyang*), interaction and interdependency of these entities. The Lepchas have numerous '*Rum*' (God), ritual and rites. In the Lepcha worldview, beliefs in the spiritual, cultural and natural realms are an integral part of their life and existence. They perform special ceremonies and offerings called '*Rumfaat*' which are performed for different reasons and seasons like, '*Muk zekding Rumfaat*' (environment day), '*Chyoo Rumfaat*' (thanks giving and invocation to the Himalayas), '*Tendong Lho Rum Faat*', (connected to the legend of deluge, saved by *Rum*), '*Rumfaat*' for the wellbeing of the village, '*Lunzilungsa*' (veneration of springs and water sources), '*Lyang Rumfaat*' (prayer for rain) etc. In these traditions, we observe that the Lepcha value of wellbeing is linked with the influence of spirits. They please the hunting god with the '*Mutrum*' ceremony to protect from wild animals. Through the spiritual priest (shamans) '*Bongthing*' they please the fertility *Rum* '*Sakyou Sakyourum*' who protects their agricultural and horticultural cultivation.

These festivals and traditional ceremonies or '*Rumfaat*' as such, affects the Lepchas cultural and spiritual belief system which makes them live their social and economic lives in ecological partnership with nature. We further that in almost all 'the "*Rumfaat*" the usefulness and values of the animals and vegetation world for the human beings are repeatedly mentioned along with the need to protect and save them from being indiscriminately destroyed from *Mayel Lyang*' (Tamsang 2007,48). 'The Lepchas are probably, the only race in this part of the world who have a vision to pray for the wellbeing of the animals, insects and vegetation world' (Tamsang 2007, 48). Such practice of veneration and worship while consuming the natural resources with an acknowledgment to reciprocate with nature defines and reflects Lepcha's traditional practices, cultural values and beliefs committed to the preservation and conservation of the nature and biodiversity. Similar to Andean's worldview, the Lepchas worldview subscribes that the natural, cultural and spiritual realms as an integral part of human life accentuating wholism and wellbeing of all these elements. Hence, human deeds are not only accountable to the world of ancestors and sprits but to the natural world too. In the Lepchas worldview, therefore, good is associated with wellbeing, prosperity, abundance, health, etc while evil stands for calamities, drought, illness or suffering etc. All of which are both directly and indirectly influenced by the sacred deities and sprits that are intricately embedded in nature.

### **3.3 Indigenous Knowledge of the Lepchas and sustainable practices**

The habitat in which the Lepcha dwell in the eastern Himalayas is 'biodiversity hotspot' with rich flora and fauna. Traditionally, Lepchas being hunters – gathers and slash and burn agriculturist, they hardly stayed fixed in one place for more than three or four years and return after a period when the fertility has returned. Traditional livelihoods of the Lepchas practiced shifting cultivation and cattle rearing, which was depended upon unrestricted access to forest areas and land which suited their practice. They sustainably managed these through traditional management system and practices which was part of their spiritual belief, custom, culture and way of life. With the intervention of British in 1860's and thereafter, through regulations

(especially forest and land use laws) and restrictions coupled with influx of population and settlement the traditional agricultural practices started to change, they adopted settled agriculture.

Nonetheless, the Lepcha people still practice traditional conservation and balancing method of '*Bukchung*' system which subscribe them to plant eight saplings for culling a tree. It also includes the collection of yams and nutritious roots from the wild and leave a part of it and roots, filled with leaves and natural compost for regeneration and continuous supply (Palit and Banerjee 2016). The Lepchas intimacy with nature and natural entities are evident in their reverence to all natural elements like rivers, mountains, caves, springs, rocks, trees or sacred patch of land. Protection and conservation of these sacred entities are often sanctioned by rituals which are part of their cultural heritage. Lepchas care and respect non human entities of nature and communicate with them (like having a specific name or folklore for rivers [legends of *Teesta and Rangeet*], animals, mountains, etc.) other than human subjectivities, the owner or deities/spirits are believed to act and drawn on humans in malignant ways if trespassed, disturbed or over exploitation of natural resources. These spiritual practices of the tribe draw to these intangible, invisible social realities that are interwoven from their ideas of sustainability. Traditional Lepcha practice encourages reciprocity thereby strengthening biodiversity and resilience such as planting trees, releasing fingerlings in water bodies, offering cereals crops to deities (*Rumfaat*) not only reinforces their connection with the nature and environment but this provides food to migrating birds and animals and also disperse seeds through them to the other places which enhances biodiversity conservation and sustenance. The '*Namthar*' have mentioned various deities representing different aspect of the ecosystem responsible for maintain a balance and harmony with nature. Driven by this belief and respect the tribe performs rituals that maintain equilibrium in the ecosystem through activities at appropriate seasons of sowing, planting, harvesting and even regulating the collection from nature. Traditional Lepcha ethno-medicine use ingredients local to their habitat and nature which are usually flowers, roots, leaves, seeds, barks of plants. They employ both natural supplements and ritual procedures to liberate

from ailments. Many useful medicinal plants are protected and often cultivated in their gardens, indirectly promoting conservation of ethno medicinal plants.

Since the Lepchas dwell in the shadow of the Khangchendzonga in the difficult terrain, they have the knowledge of the tentative disasters and natural calamities. These natural disasters which they have encountered for generations have been a part of their cultural beliefs and folklore and they have developed strategies to counter such situation. The tribe further has no concept of sin; individual violation of cultural, ethical or ecological norms invites no individual retribution from the divine but can result in an entire year of misfortune for the whole community inflicted by the divine; manifested in natural disaster and catastrophe. This socio-philosophical construct is called '*nam-toak*' (Jha and Jha 2011). The inviolability of nature in Lepcha culture often harmonize the relation between people and nature. Stories and folklore give accounts of various disasters such as flash-floods, earthquakes (due to seismic zone), forest fires, landslides, drought, famine, hailstorms which their habitat is prone to. The tribe adopt different strategies to mitigate these disasters which is a result of in-depth understanding of their landscape such as light structured houses made of bamboo and timber to encounter earthquakes, houses constructed on higher reaches, rocks or higher hallow platforms to avoid or counter flash floods etc. '*Buk-rup*' the socio ethical norm which resort to unnecessary wastage and destruction of nature are manifested in many Lepcha tradition. Folk story of the bear teaching about detoxification is not simply for amusement; rather it is rooted in the Lepcha practice of neutralizing the toxins of the edibles which they call '*Sim-Anyu-Mun*' (Jha 2001). The Legend story of '*Utis*' gives an account of such trees found in landslide prone areas. The Lepcha have a good knowledge of 'resprouters' that can mitigate the aftermath of forest fire. The Himalayan region has witnessed havoc and is prone to natural disaster. The indigenous knowledge which this tribe possesses as a result of long relation with nature and environment can be a strategy to cope and adopt for disaster management.

Resources of nature, beneficial for them are usually assigned some deities in their belief system, which ensures them to towards good use of it and not to over exploit or violate them. This inviolability imbibed in their practices ensured conservation and sustainability.

#### **4. Indigenous Knowledge System: Lessons for the Modern World**

While learning about the traditional practices of this tribe it can be emphatically said, that their practices or values were not antithetical to biodiversity conservation, sustainable and equitable development, rather compatible and congruent with the sustainability and nature conservation. Studies on disaster and risk management have demonstrated, indigenous people have a profound knowledge of the environment and habitat they inhabit, this can facilitate warning, mitigating and “prevention, preparedness and response in cost-effective, participatory and sustainable ways.”(Jha and Jha 2011, 174).

Currently, with the advent of e-commerce platforms a sustainable initiative has been initiated by Lepcha youths named ‘Mayel Crafts’ with a tagline ‘straight from the Himalayas’. Mayel Craft utilizes the indigenous knowledge emphasizing minimalism, minimal waste and eco friendly initiatives surrounding business and manufacturing opportunities. Showcasing, to the world that indigenous knowledge systems are not contrary to modernity but rather that they can indeed be synchronised together to create both economic opportunities and sustainable development efforts.

West centric worldview and scientific model of education have ignored the traditional indigenous knowledge system. It is imperative to synthesis these two systems to devise and incorporate new innovative strategies to arrest environmental problems and issues of sustainability. This can be met if these concerns are addressed: (a) documentation of traditional indigenous knowledge before it is lost (b) recognition of alternative knowledge system (c) involvement of indigenous people in resource management, development plans and strategies.

Traditional landscape and habitat which forms the world view of these indigenous people has been regularly jeopardised by standardised social order, regulations, development, modern intervention, globalisation, and subsequent expansion of human settlement. They are compelled to join into the mainstream threatening their landscape, social design, customs, culture and indigenous practices which has been instrumental in sustaining the natural ecosystem. Yet the indigenous communities have remained steadfast in the continued practices of the indigenous knowledge system everywhere in the world. Since, traditional indigenous knowledge are profoundly interwoven with their cultural identity and an evident part of their way of life; for the world it is not only their ethical imperative to preserve the cultural diversity, but for the multitude tangible and practical reasons like; novel ecological and biological insights can be acquired; learning resource management; conservation education (conservation of biodiversity for the continuity and sustenance) etc. .

We must therefore, reclaim this knowledge as our own; not impugn it as mere fantasies; lacking logic, rationality and unscientific. More honest efforts are required to restore this knowledge about sustainable sustenance ingrained in indigenous traditional practices. Perhaps understanding them would take time, but an effort to begin this, is by changing our perspectives on the traditional practices carried out by these indigenous communities world over.

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## History of Cattle Protection Laws in India with special reference to The Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021

Kuntal Sarma

### Abstract

*Cattle, and more specifically, cows, have religious, historical, economic, cultural, and sociological significance in the Indian subcontinent as a whole and in India in particular. All major religions that have their roots in India, including Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, hold cattle to be sacred. We see the presence of cattle even in the seals of the Indus Valley civilisation. Cows gained more reverence and prominence in the Vedic age. Both religious and secular literature highlight the importance of cows. During the medieval period, even the non-Hindu rulers' realized the importance of cows in Indian society, and few of them passed laws against cow slaughter. The British were very strict against cow protection activists. Demand for strict cattle protection laws continued throughout British rule in different parts of India from time to time. After independence, the demand for a total ban on cow slaughter was also voiced by certain sections of society. Many Indian states passed different cattle protection laws from time to time, the most recent being 'The Assam Cattle Protection Act 2021'. The paper aims at studying the history of cattle protection laws in India, with a special focus on the Assam Cattle Protection Act 2021.*

Keywords: Cattle, Cow, India, Assam, Protection, Act.

### I. Introduction

Since time immemorial, cattle have been the backbone of an agrarian society and economy like India. Cattle, or more specifically, cows, have religious, historical, economic, cultural, and sociological significance in India. All religions that have their roots in India, including Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, hold cattle to be sacred. Right from the Harappa seals to

the Vedas, epics, and secular literature like the Arthashastra, the cattle are held in high esteem. Realising the socio-religious significance of cattle, it was natural that the rulers would try to protect them. The ancient Hindu rulers felt proud to call themselves protectors of the cows. The medieval period witnessed Muslim rule in India. Though cattle slaughter was not prohibited by Muslim rules as such, there is evidence to suggest that a few Muslim rulers, like Akbar, prohibited cow slaughter.

The British didn't pay much heed to cattle protection in India, which saw reactions in the form of agitations and even revolts against cow slaughter. The demand for strict laws for cattle protection continued even after independence, which saw the passing of many laws and acts against cattle and cow slaughter, though it was considered inadequate by many cow activists. Over the years, many Indian states have passed acts related to the protection of cattle. One such state that has recently passed such an act is Assam. With the intention of enacting stricter legislation prohibiting the transportation, consumption, consumption and slaughter of cattle, it passed "The Assam Cattle Protection Act, 2021." The paper aims at studying the history of cattle protection laws in India, with a focus on the Assam Cattle Protection Act, 2021. Primary and secondary sources are used in writing the paper. The primary sources include memoirs, biographies, government reports and orders, gazettes, gazettes etc. The secondary sources include books and research articles published in journals, both print and online.

## **II. Historical Background**

### **Ancient Period**

Ahimsa, which encourages non-harm to all living beings, including animals, is particularly unique to the Indic traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. In many regions of India, religious beliefs have a specific impact on the relationship between humans and animals and, consequently, on animal welfare. In both Hinduism and Indian culture today, the cow plays a significant part. It embodies motherhood and stands for fertility and abundance. Bulls and ox figurines are seen on Harappan seals and terracotta figurines. The economy of the Indus Valley

civilization relied heavily on cattle. But the archeological data suggests that the bull also took on symbolic and religious significance around the third millennium BC. But there isn't much evidence, however, to imply that cows were revered. Going all the way back to the Vedic era, there is little doubt that the cow had gained a special position in the thoughts of the Vedic Aryans, notwithstanding the different claims that beef eating was common in Vedic society. The Vedic literature mentions the cow, bull, and ox more often than any other particular animal. The typical items cited in statements of wealth are cattle, herds of cattle, or the products of the cow. In battle, cattle made up the bulk of the booty. The cow or ox was useful for assisting in agriculture and transportation as well as immediately generating food with its milk and meat (Brown, 1964, p. 245).

The ancient Aryans were very concerned about the security of their animals. To protect their cattle from robbers and predators, they organised themselves into Gotras and Goshtis. Gotra and Gostha, respectively, mean "common pasture ground" and "common cow-stall" in their literal senses. Therefore, the first catalyst for the creation of socio-economic life was a shared interest in cattle. The cow is known as Dhenu, the abode of all benefits, in the Atharvaveda. The Rigveda refers to the cow as Aditi, a creature that shouldn't be butchered, and the slaughter of cows is described as a crime as awful as murder (Ganguli, 1931, pp. 217–218).

The cow had already developed a strange sanctity during the “Sutra” period (600 BCE–200 BCE). In the Brahmanadhamika Sutta and Sutta Nipata, we find the Buddha enumerating the usefulness of the cow and strongly protesting against cow killing (Ganguli, 1931, p. 219). The punishment for intentionally killing a cow back then was mutilation as a form of punishment. The Arthashastra indicates that it was forbidden to slaughter cows. According to the Arthashastra, though selling meat was allowed, cattle - calf, bull, and milch cows - were not to be slaughtered. If cattle are wrongly grazed on land not belonging to their owner, they may be driven out but not injured. It also stipulates that all cattle must have access to an abundance of food and water and that draft oxen and cows supplying milk should be provided with subsistence in proportion to the length of time the oxen are kept at work and the quantity of milk that the cows supply. It also provides detailed instructions on the type and quantity of fodder that a bull, a cow, or a buffalo must be fed (Ganguli, 1931, p. 226). Cow slaughter, or ‘govadha’, is listed as a crime in Manu Smriti as well. Similar ideas concerning the cow are

also repeated throughout the two major epics. The Mahabharata contains a verse in which it is said that anyone who murders a cow will spend as many years in hell as there are hairs on the animal's body (Kumar, 2019).

### **Medieval Period**

By the medieval period, the cow was much more revered. A number of notable Hindu kings of medieval India have been observed claiming to be cow protectors. The monarchs of the Vijayanagara Empire adopted the title Gobrahamana Pratipalanacharya, which means "the guardian of cows and Brahmins" (Kumar,2019).Sources do not shed much light on the views of the early Mughal rulers on cow slaughter. According to historians, cow slaughter is not mentioned in Babur's biography, Tuzuk-i-Baburi. Only the cow's status as an inherently sacred animal in India is mentioned. Therefore, it is unclear if the Mughal emperor outright forbade the slaughter of cows. The biography of Humayun, Humayun Nama, too, makes no explicit mention of cow slaughter. Private royal memoirs are, however, included in a book titled Tezkereh-al-Vakiat that was penned by Jouher, a secret domestic of the emperor. Tezkereh-al-Vakiat, later translated by Major Charles Stewart of the British East India Company, does shed some light on the cow-related issue. The book claims that after expelling his disobedient brother Kamran from Kabul city, Humayun was served beef for dinner by the host. The Emperor, however, declined to consume it, stating that it was not fit food and asking if the host could not even afford to keep a few goats for subsistence (Jouher, 1832, pp. 82–83).. Though historians question the British officer's ability to translate, there is enough evidence to suggest that the early Mughal rulers were opposed to killing cows for beef.

During Akbar's rule, cow slaughter was strictly prohibited. He banned the slaughter of animals on Hindu festivals.According to the Ain I Akbari, cows were considered auspicious and held in great veneration throughout Hindstan. Shah Jahan appointed Aurangzeb as the Governor of Gujrat in 1645 A. D. According to the French traveler Jean de Thevenot (1666), after becoming the governor of Gujrat, Aurangzeb ordered the slaughter of a cow inside the Chintamani Parshvanath Jain temple (Commissariat,1996,pp.101-102).There is written documentation of a royal trial over claims of cow slaughter during the reign of Emperor Fahrukhsiyar. However,

there are references to the ban being lifted for Bakr Id or Eid al-Adha. In 1857, the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, prohibited cow slaughter, outlawed the consumption of beef, and imposed a cannon-blast penalty on anyone caught doing so (Aswini, 2017).

### **Modern Period**

As the Mughal Empire began to fall, Hindu rulers such as the Marathas, Sikhs, and Dogras supplanted the Muslim Sultans and outlawed cow slaughter. It evolved into a felony that frequently drew harsh punishments like the death penalty or even life in jail, as in the case of Kashmir or Punjab, respectively. Killing cows and male cattle was punishable by steep penalties and lengthy prison sentences, including six years in Nabha and seven years in Patiala and Kashmir. The Sikh Empire was founded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who forbade cow slaughter throughout his realm at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Marathas took significant measures to prevent the slaughter of cattle and meted harsh punishment to anyone who did it. In order to stop cow carcasses from being trafficked to butchers in Bombay and Salsette, they erected blockades around Bassein in the late 1790's (Ashwini, 2017).

From the very beginning, British legislation on cow slaughter was murky and contradictory. In some of their agreements with Indian kings, they agreed to keep the ban on cow slaughter; however, in some other agreements, they declined to do so. For instance, in 1802 A.D., the British rejected Scindia, the ruler of Gwalior, when he offered to give them more land, provided they would agree to a ban on cow slaughter in the regions they had previously been granted. When they annexed Punjab, they did, however, consent to a temporary continuation of such a restriction (Kumar, 2019). Robert Clive, the Bengal Governor at the time, erected India's first slaughterhouse in Calcutta in 1760 A.D. Thirty thousand animals could be slaughtered there every day (Ashwini, 2017).

## **Kuka Movement**

Punjab was a hotbed of cow-protection protests during the British period. The ban on cow slaughter had been repealed by British authorities in Punjab, which also gave Muslim butchers permission to reopen their slaughterhouses. The Hindus and Sikhs were particularly angered by this, especially since beef was being sold on the streets of Amritsar, a sacred city. Despite their protests, the kine-killing was not stopped by the authorities. Because they revered and protected the cow, the Kukas, or Namdhari Sikhs, were unable to control their rage. In the years 1871–1872, several of them conducted numerous raids on the Muslim butchers in various locations throughout Amritsar and Malerkotla in the Ludhiana district. Several butchers were killed during the fighting. This provided the authorities with a long-awaited chance to exterminate the Namdharis. A few of them were shot off by cannons, hung, or given lengthy prison sentences. A few more well-known Kukas were deported (Singh, 2010, p. 60).

## **Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Gaurakshini Sabhas**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was the one who was responsible for making cow protection a national cause in India. He founded Arya Samaj in 1875 A.D. and advocated cow preservation with his "Back to the Vedas" slogan by claiming that reverence for the cow had its roots in the Vedas and that, as a result, cow slaughter should be outlawed. He offered both religious and economic justifications for cow protection. He made the case in his pamphlet 'Gokaranidhi' that cows needed to be protected because the Aryan race was physically deteriorating due to a lack of dairy products. The first Gaurakshini Sabha, or cow protection group, was established in Punjab in 1882 A.D. by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. The primary tasks of the Sabha included rescuing lost cows, providing them with refuge in Gaushalas, and gathering signatures from citizens to put an end to cow slaughter. These Sabhas' work of protecting cows was actively assisted by the Arya Samaj branches. The decision of the Allahabad High Court in 1886 that cows were not sacred objects as defined by Section 295 served as the catalyst for the growth of the cow protection movement in Uttar Pradesh. Intense cow protection measures were made in North and Central India between 1880 and 1920 A. D. Parties like Hindu Mahasabha listed cow protection as one of their primary goals (Kumar, 2019).

### **Mahatma Gandhi and his views on Cow Protection**

The concept of love for the cow, advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, forbade using violence to advance the cause of cow protection. He put a lot of emphasis on persuading Muslims to change their minds rather than forcing them to stop eating beef. In his own words, "It is generally known that I am a staunch vegetarian and food reformer. But it is not equally generally known that Ahimsa extends as much to human beings as to lower animals and that I freely associate with meat-eaters." He further states that "Hindus may not compel Musalmans to abstain from meat or even beef eating. Vegetarian Hindus may not compel other Hindus to abstain from fish, flesh, or fowl. I would not make India sober at the point of the sword. Nothing has lowered the morale of the nation so much as violence(mkgandhi.org).

### **III. Cattle Protection Laws in India after Independence**

There was a belief that after the country's independence, there would finally be a national prohibition on cow slaughter. The demand for a central law was growing day by day. Article 48 of the Constitution of India states that "The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle." . Many states have laws that, in one way or another, outlaw the killing of buffaloes and cattle (cows, bulls, and bullocks). Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Meghalaya do not have any laws that deal with the slaughter of cattle. Supreme Court rulings have gradually served as a reference for the prohibition's scope under various state laws.

Cattle slaughter was completely prohibited by previous state laws in states like Madhya Pradesh (1949), Uttar Pradesh (1955), and Bihar (1955). After reviewing these laws in 1958, the Supreme Court concluded that the outright banning of cattle violated butchers's basic freedom to engage in their profession or trade. The ruling states that although the overall prohibition on the slaughter of cows was valid according to the constitution, the killing of bulls, bullocks, and buffaloes would only be allowed if the animals were of a specific age and depending on their utility for milk, draught and reproduction. ("Mohd. Hanif Quareshi and Others vs. the State of Bihar,"



Supreme Court of India, April 23, 1958). In 1994, a legal amendment in Gujarat made it illegal to kill bulls and bullocks of any age. The Gujarat Amendment Law, 2005, upheld the entire ban on killing bulls and bullocks of any age. In recent times, some states have prohibited the killing of bulls and bullocks of any age, including Madhya Pradesh (2004), Haryana (2015), Maharashtra (2015), and Karnataka (2021), which have also prohibited the slaughter of bulls and bullocks irrespective of their age (prs.india.org,2021).

#### **IV. Cattle Laws and Assam**

##### **Summary of “The Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 1950”**

On April 25, 1951, “The Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 1950” was passed into law and published in the Assam Gazette. Its purpose was to regulate the slaughter of particular types of cattle in order to preserve them. This act stated that no one could slaughter cattle unless they had a written certificate from the certifying officer and the local veterinary officer of that particular area confirming that the cattle were fit enough to be slaughtered. However, certification could only be granted by the certifying officer or the veterinary officer if the cattle was older than fourteen years and unfit for breeding or work, or if age, injury, deformity or any other incurable disease had rendered it permanently incapable of being used for work or breeding, and if there was no disagreement between the two officers regarding the certificate’s issuance. If any such difference of opinion arises, then the cattle in question will not be slaughtered. The Act forbade the killing of cattle in locations that were not designated for the purpose. It allowed for fines up to one thousand rupees and prison terms of up to six months. The state government, however, may exempt any ceremonial, religious, medicinal, research or other purposes from the execution of the act by general or special order. The “Assam Cattle Preservation (Amendment) Act” was passed in 1962, which amended the “Assam Cattle Preservation Act 1950” with some minor modifications.

### Summary of “The Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021”

“The Assam Cattle Preservation Bill” was introduced in the Assam Legislative Assembly on July 12, 2021. This bill attempts to replace the “Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 1950,” which was found to lack appropriate legal provisions to address issues related to cattle slaughter, consumption, and transportation. The bill received the assent of the Governor of Assam and became an act on 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2021. Following are some of the important highlights of “The Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021”:

**Restriction on cattle slaughter:** Cattle slaughter is prohibited by the Act. It permits the killing of cattle like bulls, bullocks, and buffaloes that are beyond fourteen years of age or have become permanently unfit due to deformity or injury.

**Permissible place for slaughter:** Only licensed slaughterhouses or other locations that are listed in the fit-for-slaughter certificate are permitted under the Act for the slaughter of cattle. Certain places of worship or religious events may be excluded by the state government from the slaughter of cattle, with the exception of cows, calves, and heifers.

**Restrictions on transportation of cattle:** Transportation of cattle into, out of, through, and within Assam is restricted by the Act. However, for legitimate agricultural or animal husbandry purposes, a competent body may grant a permit to transport cattle as may be necessary. It is not necessary to obtain permission to move cattle within a district for the purposes of farming, animal husbandry, or the buying and selling of cattle at an approved animal market.

**Restriction on the sale of beef and beef products:** The Act limits the buying and selling of cattle and beef products to specific locations. No person shall directly or indirectly sell, offer, expose for sale, or buy beef or beef products in any form except in places permitted to do so by the competent authority. No such permission will be granted for the sale of beef and beef products in areas predominantly inhabited by Hindu, Sikh, Jain, or other non-beef eating populations or within five kilometers of any temple, satra, or other religious institutions belonging to Hindu religion or any other institution or area as may be prescribed by the competent authority.

**Search and seizure:** The authorities have the right to enter and search an area where they think that an offense has been committed or is about to be committed. In addition, they have the authority to hold any suspects and seize any materials, carcasses, animals, or vehicles they come across. The cattle may be donated to 'Gaushala' or any other institution, and the upkeep costs may be collected as necessary from the appropriate parties. A 'Gaushala' is a facility registered with the Department of Animal Husbandry, and its purpose is to preserve and safeguard cattle. Upon conviction, the seized cattle, vehicles, and materials will be forfeited to the state government.

**Penalties:** A fine of three to five lakh rupees in addition to a prison sentence of three to eight years is stipulated by the act. The trial court may choose to impose a lighter sentence. Sentences for repeat offenses will be doubled. All offenses are both cognizable and not subject to bail under this act.

**Exemptions:** The act will not apply to cattle slaughter i) if the cattle are used in research or experiment. (ii) if it is necessary in the interest of public health or it is found that the cow is carrying an incurable, infectious, or dangerous disease. (iii) if it is necessary to feed the animals at the state zoo or a facility of similar nature with meat other than that of cows, heifers, and calves. (The Assam Gazette, 2021).

## V. Conclusion

It becomes evident from the above discussion that cattle, and more specifically, cows, have held a very important place in Indian society and culture since ancient times. We see the presence of cattle in the seals of the Indus Valley civilization. Cows gained more reverence and prominence in the Vedic age. Many ancient Indian rulers' cows were protected. Both religious and secular literature highlight the importance of cows. During the medieval period, even a few of the non-Hindu rulers passed laws against cow slaughter. Following the British

occupation of India, things began to change. They opened many slaughterhouses and were very strict against cow protection activists. This created discontentment among a large section of society. One of the immediate causes of the Revolt of 1857 was the rumor about cow fat being used in the cartridges of Enfield Rifles, which had to be bitten before use. Cow activism continued throughout the British rule in different parts of India from time to time. After independence, the demand for a total ban on cow slaughter was voiced by certain sections of society. Even though cow slaughter is not totally prohibited, many states have implemented legislation making it illegal to slaughter bulls and bullocks of all ages.

Since ancient times, cattle have been the backbone of a largely agrarian society in Assam, and mainly in rural areas, cattle, and more particularly cows, are pampered as well as revered. Assamese society has respected cows since time immemorial. The festival of Bohag Bihu begins with Goru (cow) Bihu and is dedicated to the upkeep of livestock and cattle. On the next day of Goru Bihu, the Assamese calendar begins. Considering the importance of cattle, the government passed a few acts like "The Assam Cattle Preservation Act 1950" and "The Assam Cattle Preservation (Amendment) Act, 1962." "The Assam Cattle Preservation Act" was passed in the year 2021. This act intends to replace "The Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 1950" by providing more stringent laws against the slaughter, consumption, and transportation of cattle.

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## **Deterritorialization, Identity Crisis and Issues of Rights: Re-Reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason***

**Joydip Ghosh and Tajuddin Ahmed**

### **Abstract**

*From the very start of his literary career Amitav Ghosh depicts diasporic identity, particularly Indian or South Asian diaspora in different countries of the world. His depiction of this space is always related to its histories and subsequently one witnesses some patterns 'between cultures that diasporas straddle'. The novel *The Circle of Reason* deals with the issues of illegal migration and the plight of the migrant workers abroad. This paper studies the migrant workers' experiences as they come in contact with various groups of people and the authorities of Al-Ghazira in an effort to fulfil their desire for better lifestyle propelled by the tenets of globalization. It also offers to study the very condition of the poor and middle-class migrants in transition experiencing the psychic pangs of countering conflict zones of diverse dimensions in liminal in-betweenness, those moving between the states of home and homelessness.*

**Keywords:** diaspora, illegal migration, conflict zones, nation-states, deterritorialization, globalization

Built on the motif of a Picaresque novel Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* traces the life and predicament of a particular kind of diasporic community. These people are not the usually privileged professionally trained individuals who form a large bulk of the global diaspora these days. They are common people who are either forced to leave their country or leave it of their own will in pursuance of a dream of a better life somewhere far away from home. They form a bulk of illegal migrants, crossing the border of their usual habitat, without having any visa or passport.

Gijsbert Oonk in his book '*Global Indian Diasporas*' has talked about four types of diasporas. First, there was a flow of migration of the traders in the earliest time in search of a better prospect of trade and commerce. Indian coastal communities may be cited as very good example of that. The second notable flow constituted of the Indian indentured labourers. Many of them left their homelands to better their future lives. The third type of migration Oonk talks about took place after the Partition of India. A large body of both Hindu and Muslim population from Pakistan and India moved across the border fearing that the newly

formed governments would be unable to protect the rights of the minority. As Oonk says of the fourth type, “. . . many highly educated professionals left India to find jobs as teachers, lawyers, and doctors in the Europe (especially the UK), the US and Canada. This has recently occurred again with the exodus of many IT professionals. Furthermore, numerous migrants have found work as construction workers or housekeepers in the Middle East since 1970s” (Oonk 2007, 12). The last or the fourth type of migrants are specifically those who are ‘twice migrants’. In *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh particularly depicts the deplorable condition of the migrant construction workers and housekeepers that Oonk points out.

Following the trail of Alu, ‘a suspect’ for an extremist group, the focus shifts from the Indian port of Mahé to an imaginary West-Asian setting of al-Ghazira, an oil city of glitz and glamour. The journey in-between introduces us with a number of characters, both male and female, mainly from the western coastal line of India albeit including one or two Ghaziris and of course Zindi at Tiffaha, one of the prime figures of our study. They set sail on a small motor driven vessel called Mariamma. The motley group of migrants give us a picture of their day-to-day lives, motives, desires and aspirations. Rakesh is an ex-salesman, Professor Samuel is a theoretician about queues, Alu is a suspected extremist on chase by the Indian Police, Chunni, Karthamma and Kulfi are three women chosen by Zindi to ‘work’ at her boarding house at al-Ghazira. Zindi, as it comes out, turned into a ‘madam’ after she failed to satisfy her child-hungry husband being unable to bear a child for him and was eventually expelled from her matrimonial house.

The condition of the migrant women on the wobbly boat Mariamma points towards the duality of both opportunity and oppression offered by migrancy. On one side, there is the lure of wealth and better life, on the other side, there is the uncertainty of the promises made to them by the agents or the prospects they themselves have dreamt of. The challenge of coping with unknown circumstances, whether they would be favourable or hostile – that too in an unknown land, far away from the homeland also adds to the anxiety. On his way to al Ghazira Professor Samuel tries to find out the vocation of Zindi and suspects her to be a madam. He is sure that the women Zindi is herding home are to be put into the service of prostitution.

Zindi knows that she is under suspicion and scrutiny. However, her perspective is altogether different. She reiterates that far from being an exploiter she is offering them help and means to live. She refuses to term it her business; it is true that she gets ‘a little extra’ by putting them to ‘work’ but behind this lurks the ties of a ‘family’, a ‘home’ far from home where she actually acts as a mother figure. Her claim about finding women in India is noteworthy:



. . . when I get to India I don't have to do anything. These women find me and come running. Take me, Zindi – no, me, Zindi didi – don't take her, she's got lice. They go on like that. But I don't take them all. I take only the good girls – clean, polite, hardworking. That's why I have to go to India myself to look. I find them jobs and they pay me a little, not much, something reasonable (Ghosh 1986, 181).

Zindi's attempt to term prostitution as 'work', for she chooses girls who are 'hardworking', suggests her role as an agent in the proliferation of capitalistic power and globalization. 'This gesture', opines Kavita Daiya, 'attempts to accord prostitution the status of being productive labour, serving to dignify it and make it visible as part of the global economy' (Bose 2005, 39). Let us now have a look at what 'productive labour' means. Adam Smith, a noted economist of all time put it like this:

There is one sort of labour which adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed: there is another which has no such effect. The former, as it produces a value, may be called productive; the latter, unproductive labour. Thus, the labour of a manufacturer adds generally to the value of the materials he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master's profit. The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing (Smith 2002, Bk II, Ch III).

Following this distinction, it is customary to consider works in the households as menial and unproductive. Branded as 'feminine-gendered', especially reserved for women, such works are performed against a lesser wage than what is paid for productive labour. Being a migrant herself and having experience of years of stay in al Ghazira Zindi knows what is what of the odd jobs the migrants are usually offered, especially the women migrants. Her attempt to categorize both domestic work and prostitution as part of productive labour obviously falls in line with the contributions from women's and gender studies that contest the asymmetrical distinction between the two kinds of labour and emphasise that works performed in the private sphere by women are neither unskilled nor unproductive, rather they require both 'hard work and training on the job' (Lutz 2013).

Daiya tries to see Zindi's role not merely as a proliferator of capitalistic power but also as a link between 'the spaces of home and work', between 'familial and corporate' (Bose 2005, 39). However, the bond that ties the off-springs to their mother at home is no less visible in Zindi's relation with the migrant workers to whom she provides shelter and helps to get jobs at different places of the business hub of al-Ghazira. She puts it this way, 'It's not a business; it's my family, my aila, my own house, and I look after them, all the boys and girls, and no one's unhappy and they all love me' (Ghosh 1986, 181).

Having been banished from her own community of peoples and expelled from the house of her in-laws failing to satisfy a child-hungry husband for her barrenness, she tries to create a new identity of a protecting mother-figure sheltering her girls and boys and providing them, in an unknown land, with a sense of home and warmth of which she herself was deprived. Thus, the emigrant workers, through the entangled network of capitalistic power, in their turn help Zindi get that savour of home that patriarchal culture of her community deprived her from.

Far from depicting migration as 'a metaphor for all humanity' (Rushdie 1991, 394) Ghosh rather focuses much on its failures particularly relating to women and illegal migrants. The condition of the migrating women on the boat called 'Mariamma' highlights the ambivalence of migration in its opportunities and oppression, gain and loss. The desire and the aspirations that Karthamma cherishes for the destination country can be illustrated by her reluctance to deliver the baby until she signs the necessary forms. As Professor Samuel translates her mumblings and then reports that to others on board:

She says she won't deliver without signing the right forms. . . She'll keep it in for as long as she has to . . . She says that she knows that the child won't be given a house or a car or anything at all if she doesn't sign the forms. It'll be sent back to India, she says, and she would rather kill it than allow that to happen; kill it right now with a bottle while it's still in her womb (Ghosh 1986, 177).

The question of the signing of the form is significant in more than one way. What Karthamma wants to mean by the forms is actually puzzling. However, her desire for material things such as a car or a house for her unborn child can be interpreted in the literal sense as a general hankering for the amenities of life. The forms are obviously the instrumental means by which she can get those things. The forms thus symbolically stand for material affluence for her yet unborn child as a future citizen. These are emblematic of the migrant's desire of a lifestyle promoted and projected by modernity. In a figurative way, the forms signify "a desire for 'home': home as a place of comfort, as a sense of rootedness and belonging, as a future time of a secure life" (Bose 2005, 41). Again, the forms, as hysterically craved after by the pregnant woman in labour pain, can be taken as 'the reified reorientations of the abstract guarantee of the right to possess property (and not the right to property) and the right to have a home (and not right to a home)' (Daiya 36-55).

The asking for the forms, on the part of Karthamma, may be interpreted as an example of the homogenization of migrant desires in a mass scale in the postmodern world. The role of social media and advertising agencies is immense in this respect as they continuously try to create mimetic desire in people

across the globe irrespective of their differences of class, race, ethnicity, nationality and social or economic positions. As Amitav Ghosh himself writes, 'Today, with very few exceptions, people everywhere, on every continent, nurture the same desires, most of which are centered on commodities' (The Great Uprooting, 715). People like Karthamma fail to realise the vast differences between their real-life experiences and what they conceive through media-images, or what they hear of the stories of their kith and kins or friends and relatives living abroad. Only after arriving to the destination country and spending some time there, as in the case of al-Ghazira, that these people realise that they are 'the victims of a fantasy, that their dreams of a life like that of people in advertisements (are not) likely to be fulfilled' (The Great Uprooting, 726).

As Zindi confides it to Alu, she has a sort of boarding house at al-Ghazira. She also runs a tea-shop there. In that portion of the community, she is a familiar name; she is known as 'Zindi the Apple'. She knows a lot of people and she gets her people jobs of different kinds such as in construction, sweeping, gardening, shop work, house-hold work etc. through her connections in exchange of which they are to give her 'just a little' (Ghosh 1986,181). Even after that, they have plenty to send back home. In fact, as she claims, she proves to be a person of immense help to the migrant workers. She provides them with shelter which is very difficult to get in a foreign land and hoards and protects them as a den mother.

The migrating diasporic communities in al-Ghazira who take shelter at Zindi al Tifaha's home form a class of their own. Abu Fahl, Zaghloul the Pigeon, Alu, Professor Samuel, Abusa the Frown, Rakesh, Karthamma, Kulfi, Mast Ram and Zindi herself have left their homes behind in search of a good job and prosperous life at al-Ghazira like it is with all migrant workers. But there is a vital difference of this particular group with other migrant bodies. These people, like other migrants, have crossed the border of their respective countries with a lot of hope and dream in their eyes and found themselves landed in a geographically and culturally divergent place. But, unlike them, they do not possess papers needed to set a claim for legal stay abroad. They are not professionally trained people capable of taking advantage of the demand in the market. Most of them are illegal migrants devoid of all the amenities to be bestowed on them by a foreign government.

Ghosh extends the issue even further and depicts their marginal position as illegal migrants who form a minor subaltern class near the Souq in al-Ghazira. His critical gaze extends to encompass the condition of their travel and working place as well. That these migrants were subjected to economic exploitation and other forms of injustices is very clear from the incident that happened to Mast Ram who was a late entrant in the house of Zindi:

Once they were in al-Ghazira, Mast Ram found himself with only a third part of the wage that he had been promised in his pocket, for the contractor took all the rest. Mast Ram was young enough to burn at the injustice of it. One night he found something to drink, and his rage grew too large for him to hold. In front of all the others he flew at the contractor's throat.

That was how he found himself with his skull split half-open, without a job, without a place to stay, and blood all over his clothes (Ghosh 1986, 202).

This picture is enough to show the inhuman condition in which these subaltern workers are compelled to work. The exploitation goes at length to deprive them of the wages they are promised with at the entry point of service. If resisted, one is sure to meet the terrible consequences as in the case of Mast Ram.

Although Zindi finds some work for the residents at her boarding house in al-Ghazira through her connections and good will it is not always that they keep continuing with those works once they get in. Kulfi, who got work in a rich Ghaziri family as a cook lost her work after a few months' service because of some miscommunication with the woman of the house resulting from her lack of knowledge of Arabic. When she was dismissed from her job "She knew simple things like 'too hot' and 'more salt', but little else" (Ghosh 1986, 204). Concocted stories about Indian maids spitting in the food while cooking accompanied by language problem contributed to her dismissal. How language plays a pivotal role for the settlement of migrant workers in the host country and goes into shaping their destiny is also brought into focus by the novelist. Abusa who got his work as a gardener in a rich Sheikh's house also lost his job as a result of the betrayal of Mast Ram who reported to the police that Abusa's work permit expired one year back and he was immediately arrested. Then it was Professor Samuel who got a comparatively fascinating job of a manager's assistant in a big supermarket.

He spent his days wrapped in air-conditioning and the smells of freshly frozen Australian lamb and Danish mutton, French cauliflowers and Egyptian cabbages, Thai rice and Canadian wheat, English cod and Japanese sardines, prawns and shrimps and lobster from the world over . . . All that and nothing to do but sit at a desk and add up numbers. It was just luck, getting that job. Of course, *it made good sense for them, for they paid him less than they should have because he had no work permit* (Ghosh 1986, 208, italics mine).

While this shows the unprecedented growth of globalization creating a cosmopolitan environment, bringing the whole world under one umbrella with all its shiny hoardings and neon lights and dazzling decorations, it also throws into perspective a hidden capital-labour liaison that is always targeted at making more profit at the expense of transparency in the working arena. Thus, *The Circle of Reason* charts the thriving of a black economy that takes the migrants as its pawn as the profiteering section preys upon their vulnerable existence. It is again, almost as in the case of Kulfi, because of some miscommunication generated by cultural differences (differences in language, manners, customs, behaviour and dress-up) that Professor Samuel loses his job and lands in gaol after he undergoes a fateful encounter in the supermarket with 'a rich and beautiful' Ghaziri woman wearing 'expensive European clothes.' Abusa and Alu had to squander a good sum of money to bribe him out of the jail and 'there's at least one shop in Hurreyya now which will never hire an Indian again' (Ghosh 1986, 209-210). Such kind of incident not only involves the person concerned but goes beyond to affect the entire community's life of the everyday shattering the dreams and desires brought about by globalization and migrancy. Such changes in people's lives brought about by displacement and deterritorialization are attributed by Arjun Appadurai, a noted sociologist, to the forces of market economy, state policies, commodity consumption, corporate sectors, political structures etc. which go on operating 'in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities' (Appadurai 2005, 22).

It is clear from above that insecurity and uncertainty always loom large on the lives of these migrants. The sense of homelessness, quite common in diasporic people, eats into the very being of Zindi. After the Star collapses and Professor Samuel, Abusa, Mast Ram and Kulfi lose their jobs, Zindi gets quite anxious to manage her house and her living. The marks of anxiety and uncertainty loom large on her face. She confides her heart to Rakesh, 'It doesn't matter to you; you can always go back home. Where can I go?' (Ghosh 1986, 219).

Her apprehension turns quite right in the face of adverse circumstances when she is forced to leave al-Ghazira with a few people and heads for her 'country home'. But something other than what is expected turns out at the doorstep of Zindi's village-home when she receives some added salt to her heavily injured soul:

For that was the day they reached her village and her brothers' wives barred their doors on her and shrieked till the roof of the very house she had built for them shook: The whore's back from al-Ghazira – Fatheyya, who's given herself some fancy whoring name. She's come to take our daughters for her brothel (Ghosh 1986, 364).

It is the irony of life of a migrant like Zindi. Her brothers have built a 'big house' with her Ghaziri dirhams; but surprisingly, she is denied any entry — her last resort to shelter and hope. However, this does not happen with the other male members whom she escorts with her when she finally leaves al-Ghazira. Zindi here becomes the embodiment of all those deprived, destitute migrant women who are to pass through a never-ending ordeal, whether in the country of origin or in the host country. It is, as if, a state of 'in-betweenness', an unending passage of transit that never reaches its destination. Even the passage to home remains ever elusive, something unattainable for a woman in the position of Zindi. Ghosh thus shows that the euphoric 'homecoming' itself is replete with discrimination of rights and is heavily gendered.

Full advantage of the vulnerability of the migrant workers' condition are taken by the greedy contractors as much as by the employers who put them to work. There is no question of protection to be offered to them by the Government as they have come to the place illegally. They cannot even make an appeal to the authority about their misuse for they do not carry any valid document to prove their identity as legal workers. These subaltern people are only left to cope with their fate, to 'peak and pine' (Shakespeare 1606 [1971], 13). But al-Ghazira is only an instance, a symbol that stands for all such working places in different corners of the world that turn out to be exploitative zones of one kind or the other.

Ghosh's depiction of the de-humanising condition of the migrant community in al-Ghazira brings into focus some of the basic concerns regarding the rights and livelihood of the migrant workers abroad, especially the illegal ones. It is a very critical and multi-dimensional issue to tackle. While illegal migration is ethically and politically incorrect, it cannot be denied that a sizable number of flourishing economies in the world are to a large-scale dependent on the labour of illegal migrants. Some of the nations are active in enforcing laws as to how many immigrants are to be allowed to enter their countries in a particular year and from which countries. Some countries are trying to make their borders impermeable by raising fences or walls. But the problem is already rife. The 2004 film *A Day Without a Mexican* attempts to portray how the

Americans would fare if all illegal Mexicans disappeared all at once. 'It reveals just how dependent Americans are on this workforce' and exposes 'the citizens' own contradictory feelings and actions on the subject of illegal immigration' (Szumski and Karson 2014, 11).

Such interdependence of the state over the illegal migrants and vice versa calls for effective measures to ensure the rights of such migrants in the host country. While keeping in mind the safety and security of the state, the condition of the illegal immigrants is to be judged in a more humane way and effective measures be taken to better their working conditions, wages, living conditions, social security etc. which will ultimately lead to offering citizenship, thereby helping them to evolve in the process of cultural assimilation. Ghosh suggests, the emancipation lies in inclusion and not in the exclusionary practices and violence often perpetrated on the migrant groups by the nation states.

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## **Craft and Craftspeople in Nation-Building: A Reflection on the Contribution of Kammalas to the Culture of Tamil Nadu**

**Magha Vishnu K & Rajam M**

### **Abstract**

*Craft and Craft-making is one of the significant features of humans that makes us distinct and stand out among the other living beings that are capable of hand manipulation. In addition, the development of craft, its materials, tools and manufacturing technologies can be used as the gauge to measure the development of any society when compared with others. The innovation and improvement in craft and its technology contributed greatly to the advancement of the social and economic conditions of the people living in the society. In this light, this study focuses on analysing the role of the craft and the contribution of traditional craftspeople, the Kammalas, to the culture and progress of Tamil society.*

**Key words** – Craft, Craftspeople, Kammalas, Nation-Building, Tamil Culture

### **Introduction**

Culture is defined as ‘a complex whole that includes custom, morals, art, law, belief, knowledge and any other traits acquired by the (hu)man as a member of society’ (Tylor 1871, p. 1). From this definition, it is known that culture is composed of many individual elements called cultural traits. These traits are learnt by the people due to their ascribed status (i.e., birth status), which makes them a member in that society involuntarily as they were born into it. These acquired traits will be transmitted across several generations through the processes of enculturation in the name of socialisation. In crux, culture is the code which help and guide the people in a society to think, act and live.

In order to analyse the culture of the people, it is necessary to examine and understand the role and function of cultural traits, the smallest unit of culture, in the society. As the cultural trait pertains to one definite activity within a culture, it can easily reflect the similarities and distinctness that every culture possess. These traits are functionally related to one another and can form a distinctive inter-related pattern of activities or traditions called culture complex (Hasnain 1992, p. 64). Culture complexes are both tangible and intangible in nature and can be easily inquired to gather the knowledge on various customs followed by the people. One of the most prominent culture complexes that can be easily observed by a researcher or

an outsider is the material culture. It refers to any physical objects that people create as a part of their culture to be used in both the ritualistic (sacred) and everyday activities (profane) of a society. These include the buildings we live and work, dress and ornaments, furniture, technology, weapons, temples, mosques, crafts, arts, transportation and other objects that are mechanical, explicit and have utilitarian purposes. Material culture helps in defining the behaviour and perspective of its members in a society. It is considered as constitutive part of people's interpretation about the world and themselves. They are also infused with meanings either through association or by usage. Moreover, they could be used as a container in which the information of the society and memory of people can be stored and preserved to be passed on to the future generations (Frantz 1998, p. 793).

The studies on material culture attained attention mainly for three reasons. Firstly, in the course of history, We, humans, were able to distinguish ourselves from other living beings because of our ability to create and manipulate tools since pre-history times. This ability to create and manipulate the objects helped us to defend and protect ourselves against the threats and made us rule over the world by overcoming the hurdles (Tylor 1896, p. 182). Secondly, material culture is the first component to undergo change at faster rate when compared with the other facets of culture. Besides, material culture helps in understanding the relationship between people, their social relationships and the material they use. Since material is firmly interwoven in every relationship of the people, it is essential to study its meaning, usage and the context the context they are used. Thirdly, material culture like tools, technology and crafts can be studied in order to understand its function, to investigate how society has developed over the period of time with respect to the technological changes that occurred, and also to analyse its role in the development of society (Malinowski 1944, pp. 67-74; Morgan 1877, pp. 3-9).

Crafts are one of the constituents in the material culture. In India, crafts are considered as one of the oldest traditions that continued to exist till now. Through its long-standing history, crafts exhibited the diversity and the change undergone by Indian culture quite accurately despite its difference in the styles, technology and designs with respect to the regional culture. Additionally, in the medieval society, crafts were used as catalytic mechanism by the people to enter into the urban economy and also to elevate their social standing. In this light, this study focuses on analysing the contributions of craft and craftspeople made to the progress of culture.

## Craft and Craftspeople in Indian Society

Crafts refer to the products made through the hands of people for fulfilling the needs of the people in the society. Crafts exhibit the uniqueness that were embedded in the culture thus reflecting the values, thoughts and creativity of the people. Because of its productivity and aesthetic value, craft is differentiated from art. Thus, craft is not just about the creation of things, it also concerned about the cultural identity of makers too. According to Donkin (2001, pp. 5-6), a craft should possess three characters. They are: (a) crafts should be the product of certain type of making (technique), (b) the products should be created through skilled use of tool (technology) and lastly, (c) it should be an essentially functional object (utility). In ancient India, *silpa* is the commonly used term to refer to any kind of craft or art, meaning 'multi-coloured'. This is because craft, in broader sense, comprises many things namely labour, creativity, material, form, techniques, technology, rules, norms and beliefs of the people and their society (Kramrisch 1958, p. 224). Craft skills are learned by an individual while assisting the older same-sex kin (from master to apprentice) in the process of craft production (Goody 2001, p. 108).

According to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, who was active in restoring Indian craft tradition, crafting means enduing everything we use in our day-to-day life with the beauty rather than making exotic articles (Nanda 2002, pp. 142-57). From the perspective of Marx, craft-making is a process of giving physical form to things which helps in all-around development of an individual by improving their self and social relations. It also explores the dimensions of individuals' skill, commitment and the personal judgement of the people involved in craft-making (Sennet 2008, pp. 286-96). Thus, the term 'Craft' used to mention both the product as well as the process.

In ancient Indian society, the craftspeople were commonly called as *Silpin*. It referred to someone who possessed practical skill in a particular trade or profession and are extremely skilled at it. There were different categories of craftspeople present in the ancient society of India. For an instance, according to *Manu* (Hindu Text), the craftspeople can be placed under two broad categories viz., general craftspeople and metal workers. General craftspeople refer to those who were involved in the creation of large number of daily-use wood works such as the making of plough, utensils, pestle, bed, cart and chariots. While the metal workers refer to those who participated in the working of metals such as gold, silver, brass, copper, tin and precious stones. (Rajan 2023, pp. 45-49).

Following the evidences left by our ancestors, Setter (2003, pp. 1-2) traced the craftspeople of Ashoka period (273-232 BCE). He found that Champada, the craftsman who carved the three Ashokan edicts in Brahmagiri, to be the first known craftsman in the history of Southeast Asia. In addition, he found through

epigraphic evidences that king Ashoka heavily relied on different kinds of craftspeople to communicate his edicts and messages all over his kingdom. This proved to be conclusive substantiation that emphasised the importance of craftspeople in ancient India.

In that era, most of the craftspeople were involved in the construction of monuments like stupas, edicts, viharas and chaityas and only small numbers were involved in the production of household articles. Additionally, when iron was first introduced in India in sixth century BCE, it promoted the growth of craftspeople and artisans along with the development of industry, agriculture and trade. It was during Maurya period that craftspeople were recruited by state with provisions for the place of stay and exemption from taxes. This offset the emergence of guilds in later ages after the craftspeople systematised themselves for easier mobilisation of economic resources (Rajan 2023, pp. 48-49).

In Indian society craft and craftspeople has always played a major role in the everyday lives of people. From this light, with special reference to the craftspeople of Tamil Nadu this study focuses particularly on, Kammalas, for two reasons: (a) they are still well-known craftspeople yet mysterious because of their divine origin and complex stratification and (b) the term 'Kammalas' in Tamil Nadu cover five different craft categories who wore different identities before their amalgamation prior to the temple-building era. The following sections will introduce us the origin and contribution of the traditional craftspeople of Tamil Nadu, Kammala.

### **Kammalas: The Traditional Craftspeople of Tamil Nadu**

Kammalas are one of the important traditional craftspeople in Tamil Nadu. In Tamil poems like *Thondamandala-Satakam* and *Er-Ezhuvathu*, Kammalas' name appeared as 'Kannalan' or 'Kannalar' which means 'one who rules the eye or one who gives the eye'. The name also refers to those who make articles and open the eyes of people (Thurston 1909, p. 106). They are known by various names in South India such as Kammalar, Kamsala, Panchala, Asari, Acharya, Devakammalar, Silpi, Pattar, Badigera, Akkasale, Rathakar, Sonar, Viswa Brahmin, Daivajna, Tachchan, Tattan, Kannan and Kollan (Singh 1997, p. 1704; Thurston 1909, p. 118).

Kammalas are the entrepreneurial group composed of five occupational categories such as *Kollan or Karuman* (Blacksmiths), *Tac'chan* (Carpenters), *Kal-Tac'chan or Silpi* (Stonemasons), *Kannan* (Brasssmiths) and *Tattan* (Goldsmiths) (Thurston 1909, p. 107). In Tamil inscriptions belonging to twelfth century from Tiruvarur area of Nagapattinam, the five groups of Kammalas were mentioned as *Kammala*

*rathakarar* and *Panchala kammalar*, who were involved in the professional activities viz., smithing, sculpting and carpentering.

Though their craft activities varied according to their descent they belong to, they were identified as the community of five rather than their individual descent identity (Ramaswamy 2003, pp. 302-03). The origin of Kammalas have been associated with various myths that are passed through oral traditions and have varied versions differing from region to region throughout Tamil Nadu. They believe themselves to be the descendants of Vishwakarma, a mythical god, who is known by various titles such as the 'Divine Architect of Gods', 'Master of crafts' and 'Architect of Universe' (Thurston 1909, p. 113).

In the inscription dated 1177 AD from Macherla in, Telugu region, it was mentioned that Vishwakarma was the son of Brahma and the father-in-law of Sun. He was referred as the progenitor of architects and had the power to convert the ray of Sun into divine weapons (Ramaswamy 2003, p. 304).

Additionally, it was claimed that some of descendants of Vishwakarma family were experts in cutting the lingas of Siva, in preparing the images and idols, in building mansions with numerous subdivisions by grasping the geometry of architecture i.e., *vastu* (Appodurai 1936, p. 82). The present day Kammalas claim that they were the descendants of the five sons of Vishwakarma viz., Manu, Maya, Tvastar, Silapaka and Visvajna who were the representative ironsmith, carpenter, brasssmith, stonemason and goldsmith respectively (Kramrisch 1958, pp. 225-26).

As a result, in present-day, Kammalas prefer to call themselves as Vishwakarma. The evidence for such assertion come from the twelfth century inscriptions of Cherbolu, Nadindla and Tellapur in which it was mentioned that smiths and sculptors belong to Vishwakarma kula (Ramaswamy 2004, p. 550). Due to the notability of their crafts, Kammalas were remarkably well-endowed even when they had lower social status. They made evident contributions for the prosperity of economy and culture in medieval Tamil Nadu which were elaborated here.

### **Contribution of Kammalas to Tamil Society and Culture**

The contributions of Kammalas were associated with various activities of Tamil state-building such as producing necessities for the people in the rural areas, providing services for the commons and royals in urban areas, involved in construction of temples and urban complexes in temple premises and providing services for the army of the state (Thangapandiyan 2014, pp. 240-44). In early Tamil texts (sangam literature) *Pathupattu* (Ten Idylls) and *Manimekalai*, Kammalas were praised for their works along with the craftspeople of Magadha, Avanti and Maharatta (Rajan 2023, p. 51). This proved that the Kammalas

were proficient in the craft-making and were well known for their crafts in the region. In early medieval Tamil Nadu, Kammalas were the essential link in rural network. Every village of medieval Tamil country would employ a group of craftspeople and menial workers exclusively for that particular village. In some rare cases of inadequate craftspeople, the craftspeople in one village would take over the works of other nearby villages too (Appodurai 1936, pp. 264-65). The most commonly employed craftspeople are carpenters and blacksmiths who were essential in rural areas for their craft and craft services. The evidence for their indispensable presence in the rural network came from the twelfth century inscriptions in the reign of Sundara Pandyan and Kulottunga Cholan in the areas of Chaturvedimangalam in Coimbatore dated 1258 AD and the areas of Punganur in North Arcot respectively (Ramaswamy 2004, pp. 554-55).

Similarly, there were some craftspeople and officers like goldsmith, astrologer and doctor who were rarely employed in the village based on the economic conditions of people living in that village. Most of the time, the craftspeople were employed for generations and would get paid according to the local condition such as in cash, in grain if at the end of harvest or by means of a grant of land (Appodurai 1936, pp. 266-73). They were also paid for their service in terms of small piece of land or in terms of right to enjoy the income derived from their product, this was evident from the thirteenth century inscription from Rajasikamaninallur in Chidambaram (Ramaswamy 2004, p. 554).

From first to third century of Tamil society, there were evidences in literature which appreciated Kammalas, especially *Karuman* (Blacksmiths) for their contribution in weaponry, tools and implements (Subbarayalu 2019, pp. 189-90). They, *Karuman*, helped in holding up the village economy by manufacturing and repairing of tools used in agriculture like axes, hoes, ploughshares and spade with his smelting fire. They were also of great demand for the production of weapons which helped in the expansion of territory during the Chola period (Thangapandiyan 2014, p. 240). Many of the iron tools and implements found in the Megalithic sites of Tamil Nadu were made by blacksmiths (Rajan 2023, p. 55).

*Tac'chan* (Carpenters) were busy in creating the wooden structures and chariots for royals in palaces, making wheeled toy carts for children and wooden objects such as wheels, carts, paddlers, boats, bedstead planks, doors and temple cars in artistic manner. In addition, they were also involved in making agriculture implements such as ploughs, sickle and hoe handles for farmers to produce surplus (Ramaswamy 2004, pp. 551-59). They were also employed to craft wooden chariots, wooden musical instruments such as *parivarthiniveena* (Indian harp), *mathalam* (Indian Drum) and wooden sculptures in the period of late Pandyas (Thangapandiyan 2014, pp. 242-43). The chariot makers, *Rathakaras*, were considered to be the privilege section among the Kammalas as they were engaged in erecting the temple towers and also in

chariot and temple car making. Sometimes, they were also employed in the temple to haul the temple car during festive seasons (Rajan 2023, pp. 56-57). Apart from being a part of village community, Kammalas were also employed by the kings to work in the royal courts. From the fifth century literature *Silapathigaram*, it was evident that Kammalas were employed in the court as writers and engravers of royal records and edicts. Other evidences to support this claim were found in the inscriptions of Pallava copper plate dated ninth century and in inscriptions during the reign of Rajaraja I from the period 945-1014 AD. Which reiterated that the court had employed carpenters, goldsmith and ironsmiths to work for the government and the royal family (Subbarayalu 2019, pp. 190-91).

In the sixth century, temples were a powerful social and economic organisation which contributed to the growth of urban complexes and economy. They provided employment to different sections of people for maintaining the temple premises, the court houses, halls of learning and entertainment, treasury and galleries thereby helpful in uplifting the living standards of the people (Appodurai 1936, pp. 274-75). Among the five sub-groups of Kammalas, *Kal-Tac'chan* (Stonemasons), *Kannan* (Brasssmiths) and *Tattan* (Goldsmiths) were the ones attached to the temples. They were employed in permanent capacity for generations and lived around the temple (Ramaswamy 2003, p. 303). *Kal-Tac'chan* (Stonemasons) were experts in locating the apt stones to make idols and images of deities for temples, for building the temples. They were the specialists for examining and cutting the stones for making idols (Rajan 2023, p. 56).

Ramaswamy (2004, p. 558) states, 'for the construction and maintenance of temples and temple premises, *Kal-Tac'chan* were engaged in different kinds of works such as *Kalkuttigar* (Stone Cutter), *Sutragrahi* (Stone Measurer), *Vartaki* (Stone Dresser), *Silpi* (Sculptor), *Sthapathi* (Architect), *Tiruppanicheyvar* (Repair Craftspeople), *Kankani* (Craft Overseer), *Kollan* (Blacksmith), *Perum-kollan* (Master Blacksmith), *Tattan* (Goldsmith), *Perum-tattan* (Master Goldsmith), *Ratna-Tayyan* (Jewel Stitcher), *Tac'chan* (Carpenter) and *Perum-Tac'chan* (Master Carpenter) by the king'. In addition, there were some groups of craftspeople involved in engraving the images of gods and inscriptions in the temple were called as *Porkoyil-achari* (Engravers). The inscriptions of medieval Tamil society gave evidence for existence of resident engravers in temples (Rajan 2023, pp. 55-56). The early medieval period during the Chola reign of Tamil Nadu saw the rise of big marketing centres called *nagarams* (Cities), which rose in conjunction with the development of temple town and emergence of craft and commercial co-operation (Ramaswamy 2004, pp. 556-59).

*Kannan* (Metalsmiths) were engaged in the production of metal objects used for both cooking, household and ritualistic purposes such as utensils, bells, copper plates and metal idols of deities. A portion of metal smiths worked in the palace complex for they were involved in the minting of coins. Aside from minting

of coins for the state, during the later Pandya period they were also involved in the crafting of metal work and jewellery by creating ornaments such as armbands called *bahuvalaya*, anklets, chains, armlets, chains, crowns and pearl strings known as *virasangili* (Thangapandiyan 2014, pp. 241-42).

*Tattan* (Goldsmiths) were experts in making gold ornaments mostly for the Royals and Temple deities. This group of Kammalas would mostly work in the urban marketing centres when compared with rural counterparts. Among them they also had hierarchical division based on their working area. At the village level, craftspeople who practiced their craft in small scale like repairing works on wage per piece, which would only suffice for their subsistence was called as *Tattan*, while the craftspeople at the big trade centres were called as *Perum-tattan* (Master Goldsmith). Master Goldsmith usually had apprentice working for them. He only took part in bigger businesses like making jewellery made of gold, precious stones and pearls which were of great demand in foreign countries. They were also involved in the making of images and idols in gold and the offerings made of gold to gods such as golden flowers, fruits and in any form of customised request. These creative and artistic jewellery crafting attracted the attention of both the inland people and foreigners alike resulting in the growth of economy in urban areas (Rajan 2023, p. 55; Thangapandiyan 2014, p. 242).

During eighth to thirteenth century AD under the rule of Cholas and Pandyas in Tamil Nadu, the development of crafts attained a peak due to the increasing number of temple-building activities in Madurai, Kanchipuram and Thanjavur. The increasing need for the craftspeople provided an opportunity for the Kammalas, who were originally living in the villages, to migrate and settle down around the temple complexes. This migration became a turning point for the growth of economy in urban capitals resulting in the acceleration of urbanisation process, in Tamil Nadu (Ramaswamy 2003, p. 309). The participation of Kammalas in the process of urbanisation was evident from the Tondaimandalam inscription from Seventh century and the Chola inscription dated Tenth century (Ramaswamy 2004, pp. 556-59).

## Conclusion

From the above discussion it was evident that five subgroups of Kammalas through their crafts had significantly contributed to the development of culture and economy in the medieval Tamil society. The nature of contribution differed for different sub-groups of Kammalas with respect to the traditional occupation they followed. For instance, the ironsmiths provided service by producing and maintaining household articles, tools and implements for people in the village which indirectly promoted the livelihood and economy of the village. The carpenters worked in villages and in urban centres by providing wooden articles and objects for the household and transportation purposes. The stone masons helped the society by



participating in the building of dams, houses and temples. The brasssmiths contributed through minting of coins, utensils and ritualistic objects for the temples. The goldsmith had worked for the society by creating artistic jewels for the commons, royals and for deities in the temples. Apart from this, Kammalas were the people who paid taxes higher than any other sections of society thereby indirectly contributing to the progress of the Tamil society. In simpler words, through their creativity and hard manual labour, the traditional craftspeople of Tamil Nadu, Kammalas had made valuable assistance for affluence of the culture of Tamil Nadu. To conclude, Crafts will always hold an important place in hearts of the people as it mirrors the characteristics, memory and thoughts of people in a creative way explicitly. It cannot be easily extricated from the lives of the people because it is deeply embedded in their culture and society. Furthermore, it was evident from this study that craft and craftspeople have the ability to elevate the living conditions of themselves and others too.

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## Regionalisation and Ethnification of Electoral Politics in Post-Merger Sikkim.

Maheshwari Kharga

### Abstract

*This paper engages with the two peculiar and inter-related features of the electoral politics in the Himalayan state of Sikkim. It identifies regionalisation and ethnification of electoral politics as the key factors for ensuring electoral victory of regional political parties led by Nepalis political leaders since 1979 assembly election in Sikkim. To this end, this paper makes an earnest attempt to highlight these features and analyse the underlying causes or contextual factors which have facilitated such electoral trend in Sikkim. The first section of this paper provides analytical framework on regionalisation of electoral politics by analysing electoral performances, electoral tactics and social support base of regional parties vis-à-vis national parties in Sikkim. While the subsequent section looks into the efforts of different Nepalis Chief Ministers of Sikkim in term of facilitating ethnification of electoral politics for their electoral gains.*

**Keywords:** Caste, Election, Ethnification, Political Parties, Regionalisation, Sikkim.

### Introduction

Sikkim with an area of 7,096 sq. km is inhabited by a sparse population of 6,10,577 (as per 2011 Census). The ethnic composition of Sikkimese society is different from other North-Eastern States of India as there are twenty-one communities belonging to one of the three major ethnic groups viz., Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas<sup>1</sup>. Nepalis is a heterogeneous category which include various sub-groups belonging to different castes and tribes. The indigeneity of Nepalis is largely contested as only two Nepali sub-groups viz., Limboos and Mangars have documented history of their political presence in Sikkim. While original Bhutias migrated to Sikkim centuries earlier than Nepalis from Kham-Mina-Andong, Tibet. But since 1978 onwards, the definition of 'Bhutias' has been enlarged and contested due to inclusion of eight sub-groups of different origin viz., Sherpas, Dukpas, Tibetans, Dophthapas, Kagateys, Yolmos, Trompos and Chumbiapas. Finally, Lepchas are the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim whose place of origin is also contestable.

Over the years, Sikkim has witnessed political control of different ethnic groups. In pre-modern Sikkim (prior to 1642), Lepcha and Limboo Chiefs ruled over small and independent chiefdoms or 'proto-states' (Mullard 2011, 83)<sup>3</sup>. In 1642, Bhutias founded the kingdom of Sikkim under the religious patronage of Tibetan *lamas*

(monks) belonging to the red hat sect. From 1947 onwards, Nepalis leaders started resisting feudalistic elements of monarchy which ultimately led to Sikkim's merger with India<sup>4</sup>. Subsequently, Sikkim's integration with India facilitated regionalisation and ethnification of its electoral politics under a new democratic set up.

### **Regionalisation of Electoral Politics**

Sikkim's democratic transition facilitated the rise of regional parties as a 'natural consequence' of federal democratic establishment (Pai 1990)<sup>5</sup>. These regional parties marked the transition from what Sudha Pai referred to as a shift from '*traditional class politics to democratic mass politics*' (ibid). They came to the fore by arousing 'sub-regional consciousness' among Sikkimese and also, by opposing the Central Government's interference in Sikkim (Mishra 1983)<sup>6</sup>. Since then, regional political parties have been able to dominate state level politics due to their ability to showcase 'regional pride' (Mehra 2003) of the state in the form of its special status. Moreover, their ideological position has been to protect and preserve the distinct regional identity of Sikkim within the broader national framework of the Indian Union. To this end, they invoke strong sense of regionalist identity which overrides nationalist identity. Such identity discourse appeals to different sections of Sikkimese society considering the rights and privileges associated with it.

This fact has been echoed by leaders of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), National People's Party (SNPP) and Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP). During their interaction with media, these leaders have mentioned that Sikkimese do not trust national parties in terms of protecting their interests, rights and aspirations (Sikkim Express; Times of India). In this regard, Mishra (1983) also claimed that Sikkimese have exhibited their apathy towards plainsmen owing to which they view national party as 'party of plainsmen or *dhotiwallas*' that seeks national integration. Therefore, voters are more inclined to support regional parties even if they are faction of the ruling party or their members are former members of the ruling regional party.

On the contrary, the vote share of national parties was lowest in 1999 assembly election (Singh & Singha 2016). While in 2014 assembly election, the difference in the vote share of national and regional parties was highest (93.77 per cent) (ibid). Generally, vote share of INC has been higher than that of BJP except in the last two assembly elections of Sikkim (Teehankee, J. & Echle, C. 2023). For that matter, national parties have failed to carve their niche in Sikkim's electoral politics as they remain active only during the time of assembly election. Moreover, they do not have their organisational structures like women or youth wings in the state which could strengthen their support base (Lama 1994, 11). They are also not concerned with the functioning of their party's state unit which was evident when the then President of BJP's state unit, D. P Chauhan resigned from the party due to 'high command's apathy' towards issues concerning BJP's state unit (the print). While INC lost its support base in the state due to party factionalism and defection of its party members. Nonetheless,

INC accounts for the highest number of fielded candidates over the years while other national parties have remained largely inconsistent in Sikkim's assembly elections (Statistical Report on General Election, 1979 to Sikkim Legislative Assembly).

There are also some national parties which rely mostly on regional parties with whom they have direct connection; for example, in 1979 assembly election, Sikkim Rajya Janata (SRJ) was an affiliate of Janata Party, Sikkim Kisan Sabha (SKS) was an affiliate of Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M) and Sikkim Prajatantra Congress (SPC) was an affiliate of INC (Phadnis 1980). But INC and CPI (M) could not secure a single assembly seat while percentage of votes polled for SRJ party was also exceptionally low as compared to previous assembly elections (Phadnis 1980).

Generally, national parties have adopted the electoral tactic of parties' merger which becomes all the more convenient for them to use if such party is in power at the centre. Coffe & Torenvlied (2008) in their study have identified interplay among three complex and inter-related factors for such parties' merger. First, contextual factors arise out of the structural conditions of party system and the socio-economic environment. Second, inter-party factors are those which facilitate interaction and relation among possible merging parties. Finally, intra-party factors may vary among possible merging parties but there should be some similarity among them in certain respects and also, there should be willingness among party leaders to cooperate.

For that matter, INC initially merged with Sikkim Prajatantra Congress (SPC) by dissolving its state unit but this merger could not last long as SJP became an alliance partner of INC. Thereafter, SJP removed the word '*Janata*' (public) from its party's appellation. This instigated few Nepali leaders of other regional parties like Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) and SPC to request INC for forming its own state unit under their leadership but their plan could not materialise. Chakaravarthi (1994) referred to this as a 'phenomenon of conversion' rather than defection (Lama 1994, 102). He further claimed that INC gained such a strong foothold in Sikkim's politics that it turned out to be a 'third political force' (ibid).

In 1984, former Chief Minister (CM) of Sikkim, Lt. Nar Bahadur Bhandari's along with his supporting legislators left INC and formed Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP). When Lt. Bhandari's successor Lt. Sanchaman Limboo lost majority in the House due to the resignation of his two legislators, then once again INC came to his rescue by merging with his party. This was the last time that INC had a share in power of the Sikkim Government, albeit it was for a brief period of time.

The other common electoral tactic adopted by national parties in Sikkim is party alliance with regional parties. Alliance is an 'association of associations' (White 2018) which is explicit in nature as public recognition of such alliance ensures desirable ends for which it was formed. Alliance preserves distinct identity of the

involved parties but concurrently, it ensures them the possibility of voluntarily exit. The 'intrinsic value' of alliance is that it enhances the political outlook of the involved parties by giving rise to new and better perspectives. While its 'instrumental value' is that it plays an influential role in achieving the desirable goals of involved parties especially if they have common programmatic ends and dominant opposition. But such alliance is perilous and subject to scrutiny as its formation cannot be denied if it is subject to negative public reactions. Moreover, parties face the challenge of harmonizing their search for common agenda with preservation of distinct establishments due to the problems of bargaining or adversarialism (White 2018).

In Sikkim, national parties agree to be subordinate partner in the alliance for the sake of merely ensuring their political presence as a pan-India party. INC and Janata party followed the tactic of party alliance but they could not sustain it for longer duration. But BJP was successful in adopting this tactic by following ethno-regionalist approach in terms of addressing issues which are specific to Sikkim. In 2016, the former ruling regional party, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) joined the regional political alliance, North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) of BJP, albeit it did not agree to pre-poll alliance with BJP for contesting 2019 assembly election<sup>7</sup>.

But post-election, ten elected MLAs of SDF defected to BJP prior to two months of by-elections in Sikkim (Roy 2023). BJP further received a political boost when two members of SDF defected to BJP's alliance partner, SKM and later, won by-election for two vacant assembly seats. SKM could manage to win assembly election of 2019 by a slim margin of two seats in spite of having less share of votes (47.03 per cent) than SDF (47.63 per cent). Thereafter, SKM joined NEDA albeit earlier it had refused to forge pre-poll alliance with BJP (Gogoi 2019)<sup>8</sup>. So, BJP not only became the major opposition party but it also became an ally of the present ruling party, SKM in spite of not winning a single assembly seat and securing only 1.62 per cent vote share in 2019 assembly election<sup>9</sup>. Such electoral trend proves that alliance of SDF with BJP weakened the former while it strengthened support of new political entrant, SKM in Sikkim's politics (Teehankee & Echle 2023).

For 2024 assembly election, BJP party itself refused to forge pre-poll alliance with SKM party due to differences in seat allocation but SKM party has not ruled out the possibility of post-poll alliance with BJP based on the lines of arrangement made after 2019 assembly election (the Hindu). While SDF party has declared its political support to BJP prior to the election thereby, ensuring the possibility of SDF party in forging post-poll alliance and sharing of seats with BJP if former is able to win the assembly election. But for recent assembly election, five BLP MLAs resigned from the party owing to which only seven MLAs are contesting this election. Nonetheless, BJP has been able to mark its presence in Sikkim's politics with its candidate, D.T Lepcha winning the lone Rajya Sabha seat.

## **Ethnification of Electoral Politics**

In multi-ethnic Sikkimese society, political leaders seek to garner public support based on ethnic considerations thereby, giving rise to ethnification of the party system. In similar vein, K. Chandra (1999, 55) refers to ethnification of the party system as such party system in which all major political parties openly rely on ethnic identity for their political campaigns. Likewise, Huber & Suryanarayan (2016, 152) view ethnification of the party system in terms of the extent to which political parties exhibit strong ethnic support base. They further argue that ethnification of the party system should be measured not only in terms of size and number of political parties but also in terms of the extent to which such parties have specific ethnic support base.

In Sikkim, ethnification of the party system started after Sikkim's merger with India as a result of the majoritarian politics of the numerically dominant 'Nepalis dominated political parties' (Sinha). Since assembly election of 1979, five Nepali political leaders affiliated to different regional parties, have consecutively ruled Sikkim in the last four decades. For that matter, the first Nepali CM of Sikkim, Lt. Bhandari ruled Sikkim for three terms with two breaks in between due to corruption charges and party factionalism. His SJP party could secure simple majority (16 out of 31) in assembly election of 1979 by successfully arousing nationalistic feelings among Sikkimese (Times of India). He won equal number of Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) seats and General seats which represents Nepalis and plainsmen population of Sikkim.

In assembly election of 1985, Bhandari's SSP party won with a thumping majority thereby, setting a new record not only in Sikkim but also at the national level. It also won the lone Lok Sabha seat by securing 56, 614 votes out of 86, 024 polled votes but Lt. Bhandari relinquished his Lok Sabha seat in order to become the CM of Sikkim for the second time (Lama 1994, 106). But it is apparent that he won this assembly election due to his upper caste viz., Bahun's, Chettri's and Newar's support base as they collectively accounted for almost 40 per cent of the Sikkim's electorate. He could easily win their support not only because he was Chettri but also by offering them high rank positions in politics and administration (Chakraborty 2000, 3805). In assembly election of 1989, Lt. Bhandari secured all assembly seats by raising issues that were beneficial to discrete Nepali communities.

Lt. Bhandari's successor, Bhim Bahadur Gurung had the shortest tenure as CM of Sikkim while Pawan Kumar Chamling set a new record of being the longest serving CM of Sikkim. Chamling won the support of mongoloid Nepalis communities (viz., Mangar, Limbu, Tamang, Rai and Gurung) when he sought the creation of Backward Class Commission and implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendation in Sikkim. His 'pro-OBC' and 'pro-poor' image cost his removal from the ministry and later, from the party. So, when he formed his own party, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), then it came to be viewed as an 'OBC party' while he

was hailed as '*Mandal Messiah*' (saviour) (Bora 2004, 5538; Gurung 2011, 230) SDF party won assembly election of 1994 followed by which Chamling constituted OBC board to identify backward classes in Sikkim (GoS 2016, 87). In 1995, he ensured central level recognition to Limboos, Tamangs, Bhujels, Gurungs, Rais, Mangers and Sunuwars as OBCs. In 2000, he also declared Dewan, Jogi and Thami as OBCs at the central level (Chennattuserry et. al, 2023). He also accorded official recognition to the local languages of OBC communities (Chakraborty 2000, 3807; Sinha 2008, 34).

Chamling was also able to gradually win the confidence of other sections of the Nepalis population which Lt. Nar Bahadur Bhandari lacked. He strengthened his support base of non-OBC Nepalis by fielding their candidates from his party, raising issues that were pertinent to their interests and demanding their inclusion in the central list of OBCs (Chakraborty 2000, 3806-3807). In 2003, he ensured OBC recognition to non-listed Nepalis castes viz., NBCs (Newar, Bahun and Chettri) at the state level but by doing so, he clubbed Sanyasi community along with them in spite of their differences in caste hierarchy. But he was aware of the criticisms that he could face for this move because of which he changed the nomenclature of Central listed OBCs to Most Backward Classes (MBCs) at the state level. In 2014, he once again changed the nomenclature of MBCs to Central listed OBCs considering the futility of the category in terms of reservation quota. In 2015, he included one of Scheduled Caste community, Majhi in the state list of OBCs so as to facilitate their 'caste climbing'.

Chamling employed the rhetoric of inclusion-exclusion on the basis of caste of various Nepalis communities. He resorted to backward caste politics and politics of reservation by ensuring reservation to all communities of Nepalis. Such caste based ideological position ensured his uninterrupted rule for more than two decades thereby, making him the longest serving CM of India. Likewise, his party also ensured one-party dominance and a balanced policy of inclusion without any pattern of political alteration and electoral cycle or oscillation of political parties (Giri 2009, 150).

But in 2019 assembly election, Chamling was voted out of power by his former accomplice and Nepalis leader, Prem Singh Golay. Multiple factors are attributable to his electoral victory such as public discontentment against one-party dominance, defection of elected SDF MLAs and 'political vacuum' (Pai 1990) created in Sikkim's politics. Above all, P.S Golay belongs to Tamang community which made strong and valid claims for their reserved assembly seats as a part of their constitutional right of being recognised as Scheduled Tribes in 2003.

## Conclusion

The co-relation between success of regional parties and ethnic mobilisation in Sikkim's electoral politics differentiates its political landscape from other states of India. Considering this fact, it is rather intriguing to



investigate as to how a community that migrated from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards became successful in not only outnumbering the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim, but also ensuring their continued dominance in Sikkim's electoral politics. It is indeed fascinating to witness the success of Nepalis political leaders in fulfilling the demands of their support base by continuously redefining the social relations of different ethnic groups. They have also been able to bargain with the centre and retain their power even at the cost of opposing, merging or aligning their regional parties with the ruling national party. While national parties and their representatives have become dependent on regional parties to make their footprint in Sikkim, albeit regional parties of Sikkim have not even able to enter national level politics.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Sikkim, Indian plainsmen comprise a small section of Sikkim's population for which they are also considered as an ethnic group by some scholars. They have migrated to Sikkim from Rajasthan, Haryana, Indo-Gangetic plains, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal.

<sup>3</sup> Proto-state is similar to a state in terms of organizational structure and functioning but it cannot be called a full-fledged state as it does not have clearly demarcated boundaries (Mullard 2011, 83).

<sup>4</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1975 the then President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed gave his assent to 36<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill thereby, making Sikkim twenty-second state of India.

<sup>5</sup> Regional parties either emphasise on regional or national perspectives but their existence is confined to a particular state (Mehra, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> In 1981, Rajya Sabha election, Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP) alleged the Central Government of imposing its candidate without paying heed to the choice of Sikkimese people (Mishra 1983).

<sup>7</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2016 NEDA was formed in Guwahati by BJP along with ten regional parties (including SDF) as the first 'political coalition' of a national party for north-east states (Gogoi 2019). It was formed a day after the formation of first BJP led coalition government in Assam.

<sup>8</sup> SKM attempted to forge an alliance with BJP prior to assembly election of 2019, but it was not successful due to disagreements between the two parties over seat-sharing and common minimum programme. Moreover, SDF as a partner of NEDA was also opposed to such alliance owing to which SKM-BJP alliance was forged prior to by-poll elections (Swarajya 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The Buddhist minority communities of Sikkim expressed their apprehension of being subsumed by *Hinduvta* nationalist ideology of BJP (Roy 2023). While social media users were aggrieved by the fact that BJP would eventually rule even if SKM or SDF wins public mandate (ibid).

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## Issues and Challenges of Menstruation A Study on Young Women in Cachar District

Mahuya Roy Karmakar and Anuj Kanchan Datta Roy

### Abstract

*Menstruation, also known as menses or period, is one among other traits that brings biological differences between men and women; the difference has transmitted itself from biological to sociological issues as well. It is not unknown that humanity includes more than one sex; one being the male and rest are transgender and female. However, woman, a womb, are taken for granted in terms of differences in sexes where the inferior is often the second one, being the first one superior, the male and the rest i.e., transgender has somehow managed to be considered as other sex, of course, the struggle was stretched and thorny one. The nature of sexuality woman possess is different from men; not only the external physical differences but they do possess internal differences as well, and these differences are scientifically known as 'sexual dimorphism' and are often cause of unequal treatment towards women. This statement might provoke comments and criticisms by the believers of equal rights activists but reality cannot be unseen. Menstruating women in our society often have to face various challenges and issues which are best termed as sexist stereotypes. The paper is an attempt to bring into light one of the most sexist stereotypes, the menstrual taboo, to the world of academically enlightened society with an expectation of limiting the consequences of the taboo in society by the contribution of academically elevated minds and various social action groups.*

**Key Words:** Menstruation, Women, Menstrual Health and Hygiene.

### Introduction

Enough ink has already flowed over the subject matter that is going to be discussed here now but is yet to be concluded and hence, another attempt is being made to study the core issue again and is nothing but 'women'; and their multifaceted issues. What made 'women' as evergreen issue of study? And what made this sex to be 'women' with particular traits? What inner values do they possess which made them so special and centre of attraction all the way? May be the answers can be revealed by knowing what is a

‘woman’ first. It is not unknown that humanity includes more than one sex; one being the male and rest are transgender and female. Pure femininity makes a particular gender ‘woman’ which is different from men and other sex. It is also being argued that a woman thinks with her hormones only. But is masculinity free from hormonal stimulation? Often woman is considered as burdened object by its opposite sex because of the properties that particularizes her from that of other sexes. These might be her ovaries and uterus which is considered as threat to her own self many a times and the reason of putting her into prison and restricted environment; being the field ready for her opposite sex to dominate and subjugate her. Aristotle can be referred in this context saying “the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities”. His views on household delineating the role of father, the man, as master of the household signify man’s control over his wife as husband, over children as father (Mukherjee 2024, p. 122).

However, the journey thus symbolizes humanity of man only who delineate woman in relation to them only. The sociality never considers woman as an autonomous entity whereas the concept of ‘self’ is related to men only and for women it is always ‘others’. This ‘self’ ‘other’ syndrome of complex social mindset always put women, the other sex, into vulnerability. But a question immediately arises: why do women accept such condition where they are easily put into such situation? Are they minority? Not likely, because they make half of humanity. However, woman, a womb, are taken for granted in terms of differences in sexes where the inferior is often the second one, being the first one superior, the male and the rest i.e., transgender has somehow managed to be considered as other sex, of course, the struggle was stretched and thorny one. The biological differences between sexes are often considered to keep women under a restricted life in reality. This statement might provoke comments and criticisms by the believers of equal rights activists but reality cannot be unseen. The nature of sexuality woman possess is different from men; not only the external physical differences but they do possess internal differences as well, and these differences are scientifically known as ‘sexual dimorphism’. Differences in physiques are indeed complimentary to each other in the very natural process of reproduction and attracting each other. Woman having breasts though of different types with age are indication of her ability to feed her child whereas men have only flat chest with nipples. Similarly, with deep voice men has higher level of male sex hormone. The sex hormones also determine the face shapes of men and women; Men having stronger brows, cheekbone and jaw lines actually have more testosterone and shows aggressiveness and vigor. Similarly, women with fuller her lips, wider face and higher her eyebrows have higher level of estrogen.

Androgens, sex hormone, help grow more hair on men's body which men have more and in terms of strength also, both men and women are not same. The most important biological differences between men and women include the differences in their reproduction system.

Reproductive system in women includes many functions, especially, menstruation, also known as menses, menstrual period, menstrual cycle or period. Women start ovulating when she reaches puberty and during her ovulation period ovum is released from one of her ovaries – the female reproductive organ. During that time if the egg is fertilized by sperm during its way to the fallopian tube then pregnancy occurs and if fertilization does not occur, the endometrium (the lining of the uterus) along with blood and mucus from the vagina and cervix form the menstrual flow that leaves the body through the vagina. This occurs throughout the whole reproductive life of women. The ovulation among women usually starts on fourteenth day and the cycle continues twenty-eight days. The cycle starts with the first day of one period and ends with the first day of next period. The length of cycle is not similar; from one to three years of her first period woman may have her cycle as short as 21 days and as long as 45 days. Various factors affect the process also like, stress, exercise or diet. Moreover, women face several health issues during her menstruation.

The paper tries to understand the following objectives at above backdrop. It is further an attempt to bring into light one of the most sexist stereotypes, the menstrual taboo, to the world of academically enlightened society with an expectation of limiting the consequences of the taboo in society by the contribution of academically elevated minds and various social action groups.

### **Objectives**

1. To discuss the nature of health issues and risk women face off during menstruation.
2. To bring into light the existing socio-cultural attitudes towards menstruating women in India.
3. To know the mechanisms adopted by state towards menstruating women.
4. To understand India's stand towards menstrual leave.
5. To know the responses of young women (respondents) about challenges of menstruation.

### **Methodology**

The paper is based on empirical method of study. Cachar district has 8 Educational Blocks namely, Katigarah block, Lakhipur block, Narsingpur block, Raja Bazar block, Salchapra block, Silchar block, Sonai block and Udharbond block. Out of these 8 blocks, Lakhipur block is selected through purposive sampling; Lakhipur block has again 22 clusters; 25 per cent of the clusters have been selected by the



technique of simple random sampling. 25 per cent of 22 equals to 5.5. Thus a total number of 6 clusters have been selected namely, Lakhipur town cluster, Pailapool Cluster, Fulertal Cluster, Binnakandi Cluster, Kashipur Cluster and Jirighat Cluster. Under the selected Clusters only girls' secondary schools have been selected since the subject of study is related directly to girls. Moreover, the respondents will be taken from the students of Classes IX and X only keeping in mind the average starting age of menstruation. The total number of girls' secondary school is 1 in / among all the 6 selected clusters and is under Lakhipur Town Cluster only. For the purpose of study, the intended sample size is 20 per cent of the total population of 62 (the total number of female students in Class IX and X in the girls' secondary school under the selected cluster) i.e. 12.4; thus a total number of 13 female students have been selected. Similarly, under Silchar block there are 11 clusters; like Lakhipur block, 10 per cent of the clusters have been selected by the technique of simple random sampling. 10 per cent of 11 equals to 1.1. Thus a total number of 1 cluster has been selected namely, Nazirpatty Model Cluster, containing 3 girls' secondary schools. As these three secondary schools are within Silchar Municipality area only, so, 10 per cent of these three schools i.e. 0.3; hence, 1 school is selected for the purpose of present study. Moreover, all these three schools are located within the radius distance of 2 kms and students belong to almost similar socio-economic background only. So, out of these three schools, D.N.N.K Girls' Higher Secondary school was selected randomly. Here, the intended sample size is 20 per cent of the total population (231); hence the number of respondents stands 46.2 which actually stand 47 for the purpose of the study. Thus, the total number of respondents stands 60 from both clusters. Data have been collected from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Primary data also comes from author's personal observation and experience on the issue talked about. Facts and data used in developing the paper have also been collected from secondary sources which have been culled by the author from different sources such as of books, journals, newspapers, government policies and authentic online resources.

## **Discussion**

### **Challenges of menstruation**

Menstruation brings a lot of health challenges to women's life. Pain is the most common health issue that most menstruating women come across. Prostaglandin is released during menstruation and is a hormone which can cause painful uterine contractions, leading to distressing cramps affecting life and work (Elder 1983, p. 703). Some women face heavier bleeding than others. Heavy bleeding often leads to anemia or iron deficiency. This issue carries low red blood cell or hemoglobin that carries oxygen to body's issues. Anemia causes tiredness all the time, lightheadedness, dizziness, fainting among women. Irregular

periods mostly at the beginning among adolescent girls are also complex in nature. Young women might get two periods in a single month or might not get any period for three or four months. Other consequences are acne breakout, bloating, sore breast, fatigue and mood swings. Women also experience symptoms of pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) that varies from women to women and include insomnia, rapid mood swing, dizziness, bloating, tiredness, breast tenderness, difficulty concentrating, and social withdrawal. PMS can be of severe form such as of depression, anger, anxiety, irritability, tension, feelings of being overwhelmed and like this.

Menstruation even poses psychological and social challenges for many women. At social level, many women face stigma on menstruation and dearth of opportunities and scope to get out of those stigma and discuss about menstruation in open platform. Women's mobility and certain activities including household, during menstruation, are also restricted often on religious and cultural considerations because, menstruating girls are considered as impure or dirty. At institutional level also, women often lack proper facilities like, clean washroom and running water to maintain hygiene during her periods; they lack access to resources like, sanitary napkins as well. Parents of young girls also lack knowledge about menstrual hygiene management (McCammon et al., 2020, p.291). A recent incident, in Maharashtra, of a girl's killing by her own brother after she was mistaken for sexual / physical relationship with man as the stains of blood was found on her clothes has shocked the society (Bhattacharya and Muralidharan 2023, p.11). At the same time it was a clear indication of social low-awareness among men about menstruation, a natural process in female human body. In times of emergency or conflict, women face different challenges with no safe and private washroom and lack of water and materials to manage periods. Health risks relating reproduction and Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) may easily occur due to poor menstrual hygiene (UNICEF 2018). Moreover, the prevalent stigma, taboos and myths about menstruation hinders women to practice healthy habits leading to safe menstruation.

### **Recognizing Menstrual Health and Actions Taken**

WHO recognizes menstrual health issue as a human rights issue and not merely a hygiene issue. In this context the Organization identifies menstruation as a health issue from physical, psychological and social perspectives that need to be addressed from before menarche to after menopause. Women must have access to information and education, products, water, sanitation, disposal facilities about menstruation; to have competent and empathic care when needed and be in an environment where menstruation is taken positively and allow women to take part in social acts. WHO recognizes the role of different sectors in promoting and safeguarding menstrual health; and encourages health policy makers to engage with

different sectors to promote the rights of women from humanitarian context the health needs of menstruating women. Hence, Governments, NGOs, activists have been putting efforts on the issue of menstrual health and hygiene in recent time. Some states have removed taxes on menstrual products; some are trying to address the challenges in it and some states could develop laws and policies for medical leave for menstruation in case of physical un-wellness like discomfort, pain and other signs or symptoms of menstruation (WHO 2022).

In India the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme was launched in 2011 under the aegis of Ministry of health and Family Welfare that prominently focused on the distribution of sanitary napkins in communities through ASHAs at low rate. During 2014 the Ministry of Jal Shakti incorporated the menstrual hygiene management in the Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin initiatives and later in 2015, the Ministry of Education (MoE) launched the National Guidelines for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) which paved ways for states to act on the issue of menstrual hygiene management. Initiatives by Ministry of Health and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are quite broad and a number of actions taken under the aegis of different ministries also. Different schemes have been adopted by different Ministries focusing on Menstrual Hygiene Programme; *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Swachh Vidyalaya* component under Samagra Shiksha by Ministry of Education, Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin under Ministry of Jal Sakti, *Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram* under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, School Health Wellness Programme under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare& Ministry of Education jointly, National Rural Livelihood Scheme under Ministry of Panchayati Raj, and efforts by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports are prominent among others. During 2021-2022 the menstrual hygiene management awareness and menstrual waste management policy incorporated in itself the indicators of Menstrual Hygiene Management.

India emphasizes the Menstrual Hygiene Policy that aligns with India's commitment to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to Goal 3, 4, 5 and 6 stating good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, and clean water and sanitation respectively. The Policy emphasizes girls' or women's access to safe menstrual hygiene products at affordable price. Equity in terms of access to those products irrespective of women's socio-economic and geographical location is also targeted. The Policy is inclusive in nature in including all women and adolescent girls, minorities, ethnic groups, trans and non-binary population and vulnerable population. Creating awareness on menstrual hygiene education, providing safe and hygienic facilities, waste management of menstrual products in eco-friendly way leading environmental sustainability, collaborations and partnership among

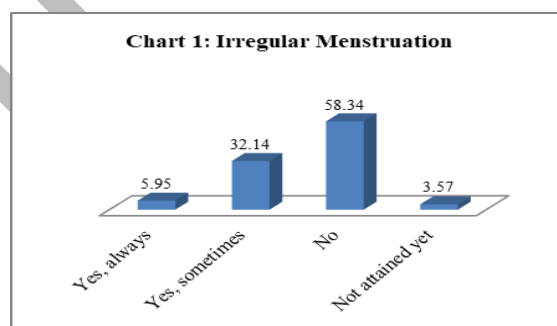
various stakeholders to bring innovative solutions towards addressing menstrual hygiene challenges have been the key principles of Policy (Wankhede and Sivakami 2023, p.7).

Efforts made by India regarding Menstrual Hygiene Management is quite appreciable but there is still lacking from state's end to consider menstruation as medical issue relating health. The first ever initiative was taken during 2017 when the Menstruation Benefits Bill 2017 was introduced suggesting four-day leave during menstruation. The Women's Sexual, Reproductive and Menstrual Rights Bill, 2018 was introduced by Shashi Tharoor which aimed at amendment of certain enactments so as to emphasize on the agency of a woman in her sexual and reproductive rights and to bring equity regarding menstruation for all women by the state. It had a provision for providing sanitary napkins by authorities in their premises also. Then the Right to Menstrual Hygiene and Paid Leave Bill, 2019 was introduced in the Lower House that proposed a right to "paid leave" and absence from work for three days of the menstrual cycle. Again in 2022 the Right of Women to Menstrual leave and Free Access to Menstrual Health Products Right Bill was introduced for paid leave and absence from work for three days during menstruation in government establishments and the same for female students in educational institutions. Recently, on responding to a supplementary query by RJD MP Manoj Kumar Jha on if the government has been looking into providing any law for menstrual leave, Smriti Irani, Union Women and Child Development Minister, opined that menstrual cycle is not something handicap but a natural part of women's life journey; she added such leave could bring discrimination against women in the workforce. It is worthy to mention here that the menstrual leave policy is not similar for all the states in India. Only Bihar and Kerala are two Indian states to allow menstrual leave to its female employees. In 1992 Bihar initiated its policy of menstrual leave for a period of two days each month. Kerala also introduced the same leave policy for students. The Maharashtra Shops and Establishment (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill 2023 proposes to allow menstrual leave to female employees working in shops and establishments in Maharashtra; during 2023 the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has published the draft National Menstrual Hygiene Policy, 2023 containing objective of menstrual friendly environment for settings like, home, educational institutions, work place and public spaces. Moreover, industries like, Zomato, Gencosys and Khaitan & Co, Byjus, FlyMyBiz etc. have been encouraging menstrual leave policies during 2017 and 2020 and later on. On the other side, recently, the Supreme Court turns down in addressing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) relating menstrual leave of working women and female students emphasizing that this is a policy issue that need to be addressed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (BCP Associates LLP 2023). Diverse opinions have

come up from different areas about menstrual leave policy in the state but not much of positive results in broad range have been reached so far.

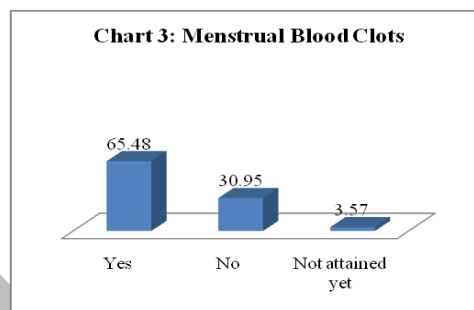
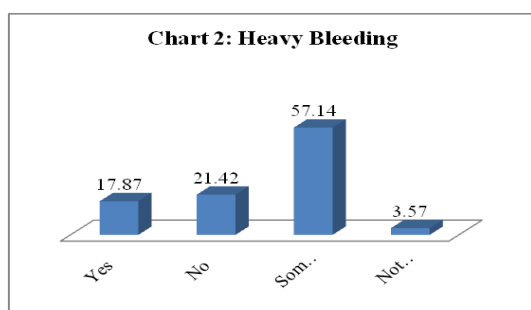
## Results & Analysis

This section presents the results of analyzed data collected from respondents through the technique of interview with the help of a structured questionnaire. Analyses of data elucidate various objectives of this paper and help us to understand different dimensions of the issue of menstruation among young girls from different perspectives. Respondents have been stratified on the basis of religion, caste, and on the basis of their geographical belongings as well. Among the total respondents, 69.05 per cent follow Hinduism whereas 28.57 per cent were the followers of Islam and only 2.38 per cent were followers of Christianity. The percentage of respondents belonging to Scheduled Caste is 29.76; for Scheduled Tribe it is 3.57; and for OBC and General it is 16.67 and 50 Per cent respectively. Further, 58.33 per cent of the total respondent belongs to urban area whereas 41.67 per cent are from rural area only. With this background respondents have expressed their personal experiences of menstruation on irregular basis. 5.95 per cent of the total respondent experience menstruation always on irregular basis; 32.14 per cent finds sometimes irregular; and for 58.34 per cent it is not irregular. It is worthy to note here that 3.57 per cent respondent have yet to experience their first menstruation though they have attained the age for this. Chart 1 below presents a clear view of what has been said above.



Regarding the length of cycles it is found that 54.76 per cent of respondent has the same cycle every month and for 41.67 per cent it is never same. Charts (2 & 3) below presents the percentage of respondents experiencing heavy bleeding and presence of blood clots respectively. Majority of the

respondents have viewed that they experience it heavily; for 17.87 percent it is 'always yes' and for 57.14 per cent it is 'sometimes' though. Only 21.42 per cent have expressed negatively in this regard while 3.57 per cent abstained from responding because they are yet to attain the same. Similarly, majority of the respondent (65.48 per cent) viewed that they do have blood clots during heavy bleeding while only 30.95 per cent do not have the same; 3.57 per cent is not counted like before who did not attain menstruation. Chart 3 below presents an overview of this.

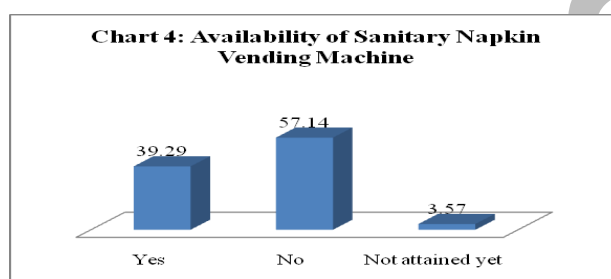


Pain and cramps are other challenges of menstruation and young women often face it severely. Majority of the respondent (47.62 per cent) experience pain and cramps 'sometimes' and 39.29 per cent find it 'always'; only 9.52 per cent expressed in opposite way in this context. Thus, a total of 86.91 per cent respondent faces pain and cramps which is really an issue to be taken into consideration seriously since it affects not only the physical wellbeing but directly affects the studies and other productivities by them and their mental health as well. This also acts as a hindrance to both the physical and all-round wellbeing of the target population.

It is worthy to know the attitudes of the family and society towards menstruating women; an attempt is made to know the same from the respondents and majority (94.05 per cent) clearly opined that they are not allowed to worship during menstruation and only a very nominal percentage (2.38 per cent) expressed positively in this regard. Further, those who do not practice worship they also face social segregation in socially/locally organized religious activities mostly by their family, relatives and known ones or they themselves abstain from participating as it has been taught to them since the very beginning about being impure during menstruation and is the reason that they keep themselves alienated from these matters.

Social taboos like, menstruation is completely a private/personal matter and talking about it publicly is something shameful has influenced the society at large and the same thought is very much prevalent among the respondents. In this study majority (65.48 per cent) respondents are found always worried about getting leaked and stain on clothes; for 27.38 per cent it is 'sometimes' and only 3.57 per cent never worries for the same reason and another 3.37 per cent have no opinion since they belong to whom who

are yet to attain menstruation. Further, maintaining good hygiene is one of the important pre-conditions for healthy menstruation and overall physical and mental wellbeing. Chart 4 shows that among all respondents, majority (57.14 per cent) do not avail the facility of sanitary napkin vending machine whereas 39.29 per cent enjoy the same facility at institutional level. It is also found that majority of the respondent (96.43 per cent) could avail the facility of running water at intuitional level. This percentage may be considered as equivalent to cent per cent only because the rest 3.57 per cent is those who do not experience menstruation.



During menstruation 66.67 per cent respondent skip attending their respective institute 'sometimes' because of heavy bleeding; 20.24 per cent 'always' skip the institute and 9.52 per cent never skip for the mentioned reason. At the same time majority (76.19 per cent) of the respondent viewed in favour of one day leave during menstruation whereas 20.24 per cent expressed negatively for the same subject.

To conclude, the paper powerfully demonstrates multiple aspects of menstruation among young women from different dimensions; while various initiatives have been taken for safe and hygienic menstruation by national and international bodies, ground realities often appear different. At this moment, researchers, policy makers, social action groups must understand and address the challenges more delicately. The result and findings of this study as the content of this paper would undeniably help shaping the policy programmes of the government in the concerned area and would invite more academic and scholarly thoughts to bring a new outlook of society towards the issue of menstruation. To be more precise, there is an urgent need to scrap all the tagged taboos of menstruation so as to ensure women their full respect, dignity and rights and protect their psychological and emotional health from all man-made odds.

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**Peasant Consciousness and Resistance in Kashmir, 1930-1947: Beyond the Dominant Narrative of 'Kashmiri Nationalism'**

**Abdul Maajid Dar**

**Abstract**

*This article seeks to analyse the relationship between the Kashmiri peasantry and the 'Kashmiri nationalism' which has so far remained unexplored. Focusing on examining this relationship from 1930-1947, the article argues that the dominant discourse on Kashmiri nationalism represented by Sheikh Abdullah and his organization (the Muslim Conference and later the National Conference) has in practice ignored the peasant voices and interests, while claiming to be a representative of all Kashmiris. It delineates how and in what context the Kashmiri peasants articulated an alternative discourse on freedom against the programme and politics of the National Conference. It also examines to what large extent their alternative politics influenced the politics of the region. Further, the article attempts to uncover the reasons that prevented the peasant leadership from converting their resistance into a viable alternative to the National Conference to shape Kashmir's future political, economic, and social structures along the lines of their own discourse on freedom.*

**Keywords:** Kashmiri Nationalism, Peasantry, National Conference, Kisan Mazdoor Conference

**Birth of Kashmiri Nationalism: Situating the Peasant Question**

The roots of Kashmiri nationalism lie in the movement against the autocratic Dogra rule which began on March 16, 1846, and ended in 1947. Considering Kashmir a purchased property, the Dogra regime reigned over the region by employing politics marked by religious patronage, despotism, sectarianism, nepotism, persecution, and militarism. It, while choosing Hinduism as a source of its legitimacy in Kashmir, emphasised on to shape the political, social, and economic structures of nineteenth-century Kashmir along the lines of this politics (Bose 2003, 16-18; Khan 1980, 11-37, 118-27). This undemocratic politics of Dogra rulers was flagrantly

biased towards the interests of their Hindu coreligionists. Kashmiri peasants, who constituted the great majority of the valley's population, were particularly hard hit by Dogra autocratic rule that subjected them to ruthless oppression and exploitation. They were deprived of proprietary rights in land, heavy and arbitrary taxes were imposed on them, and an already established system of 'begar', the worst form of forced labour, was consolidated under which the cultivators were forced to perform different tasks for the Dogra regime without remuneration (Bazaz 1941, 63-65; Dhar 1989, 126-129). To avoid the degrading practice of begar, some peasants resorted to 'bribing officials with gifts and money, while others sold their lands for a pittance to secure written exemption from all forms of forced labor' (Hussain 2021, 28). In addition to this practice of begar, the state also exploited the peasantry at harvest time by collecting shali (unhusked rice) from them at half the original price and selling a fixed amount of it to the city populations, particularly shawl weavers, who were the state's substantial source of annual revenue, at a very low price (Saraf 1977, 291-292; Zutshi 2003, 65-66). Furthermore, a new class of landed elite of Hindu compatriots—non-Kashmiri Dogras and Punjabi Hindus and Kashmiri Pandits—created by the Dogra regime made the condition of Kashmiri Muslim peasants further worse. This landed elite, as the state's recognised jagirdars and chakdars, while exercising complete control over the cultivators, collected land revenue arbitrarily, imposed additional taxes on cultivators of their respective jagirs, and acquired ownership rights over extensive tracts of land fraudulently, causing extra-rise in rural indebtedness (Bazaz 1941, 252-253; Lamb 1993, 84).

Most importantly, the Dogra state exempted the Kashmiri Muslim religious elite, particularly shrine custodians in urban areas, who, by using their religious power, used to extract food grains from Muslim cultivators for their own personal consumption, and the Hindu upper class from land-related payments, begar, and heavy taxes imposed on common cultivators, as well as granted revenue-free land grants to these classes for the services and loyalty they rendered to the state (Hussain 2018, 92, 2021, 28; Rai 2004, 150-167). As a result, 'traditional ties of obedience to these shrine custodians prevented an agrarian revolt, and the complicity of the Muslim elite with the Hindu bureaucracy ensured the continuing dominance of the upper classes' (Hussain 2021, 28).

It was against this background that Kashmiri Muslims, for the first time, openly revolted against the Dogra despotism on July 13, 1931. As a result of this mass revolt, Sheikh

Mohammad Abdullah was embraced by his Muslim community, particularly the toiling masses, as their undisputed leader. He, together with Kashmiri upper and middle-class Muslims and Muslim religious elites, formed the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, Muslims' first political organisation in the region, in October 1932 to protect and fight for the rights and interests of the whole Kashmiri Muslim community by uniting Kashmiri Muslims under a single political umbrella (Abdullah 2013, 121-126; Hassnain 1988, 75-77). However, the Muslim Conference failed to convert its goal of uniting the Muslim leaders into concrete politics and utilise the opportunity provided by the 1931 mass uprising against the Dogra despotism. The ideological differences associated with the issues of shrine worship and the meaning of Islam in Kashmir among Muslim religious elites, particularly between the Mirwaiz (head preacher) of Khanaqah-i-Mualla and his rival Mirwaiz of Jama Masjid, led not only to a split within the Muslim Conference but also made the party to ignore its revolutionary vision (Hussain 2018, 94-95; Zutshi 2003, 229-237). Consequently, 'Abdullah's Muslim Conference adopted a 'moderate' stance of presenting memorandums and recommendations to the Dogra state' (Hussain 2018, 95).

By the mid-1930s, young Kashmiri political activists, both Muslims and non-Muslims, articulated a new discourse on freedom, calling for reorienting the Muslim movement against the Dogra autocratic rule along secular-socialist lines that could improve the miserable plight of the poor peasantry, encourage agricultural development, reduce poverty and protect the interests of all Kashmiri downtrodden classes constituting the vast majority of the region's population. Under the influence of this narrative, Sheikh Abdullah eventually, in June 1939, renamed the Muslim Conference as the National Conference 'to widen the scope of his movement and include all religions and classes in its fold' (Hussain 2018, 96). The adoption of the word 'national' in place of 'Muslim' represented an ideological shift on the part of Muslim leadership, the shift that declared the newly formed National Conference as the representative body not only of the Muslim community but of all Kashmiris. Most importantly, fighting for the interests of all downtrodden classes of Kashmir was seriously adopted as the primary objective of the National Conference. The flag chosen for the party was red in colour with a white-coloured plough in the middle, 'representing socialist revolution for the Kashmiri peasantry' (Zutshi 2003, 253; see also Haksar 2015, 16). Furthermore, in its first two annual sessions held in September 1939 and 1940, respectively, the Conference unanimously adopted

socialist-oriented resolutions, calling for transferring all kinds of land to the actual tillers of the land, cancelling debts of poor peasantry and conferring proprietary rights to them (Bazaz 1941, 328-329; Parashar 2004, 175). These resolutions also stipulated that the regional struggle against Dogra despotism would not make any compromise with these economic provisions.

### **Peasant Disillusionment with National Conference's Narrative of Kashmiri Nationalism**

Sheikh Abdullah, soon after the formation of the National Conference, failed to convert its secular, democratic, and socialist programme into concrete politics. To increase the Conference's support base within the Muslim community, Abdullah prioritised religious identity over nationalist politics and so strengthened his association with Muslim symbols, shrines and mosques at the cost of his commitment to nationalism and secularism (Bandhu 2000, 43-46; Bazaz 1941, 324-325). As a result, the National Conference's Hindu members, such as Prem Nath Bazaz, who remained a close associate of Abdullah throughout the 1930s, Kashyap Bandhu and Jia Lal Kilam, became disillusioned with Abdullah's politics and eventually resigned from the Conference in the early 1940s, arguing that it ceased to be a representative body of all Kashmiris.

Furthermore, in the 1940s, Abdullah's National Conference made a compromise with its revolutionary socialist programme, and the poor peasants were again betrayed when their interests were subsumed in ideological battles and power politics. This is clear from the following facts. First, in 1942, the National Conference accepted the Dogra state's proposal to fill the state legislature's (Prajā Sabha) eight vacant seats. Contrary to the constitutional provision of filling these seats through elections, the Maharaja, in collaboration with the Conference, filled these seats with nominated members all belonging to the Conference (Bazaz 1954, 192-193; Para, 2019, p. 107). Second, in July 1943, the Maharaja appointed the Royal Commission, dominated by jagirdars, reactionaries and government pensioners, to reform the state's administration. Following the National Conference's approval, its two members—Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq and Mirza Afzal Beg—joined the Commission (Hassnain 1988, 117). Third, the National Conference adopted an apathetic attitude in addressing the economic crisis that Kashmir experienced during World War II. It was the region's poor peasantry that was severely hit by this economic situation. These National Conference's acts, characterised

by the formation of its alignment with autocratic Dogra rule and upper classes, were vociferously opposed in the public domain by the Kashmir Socialist Party, formed by the Bazaz-led socialist group in 1942 to fight against Dogra autocracy on secular-socialist lines, as well as by the Muslim Conference, which was revived by Abdullah's former close associate from Jammu, Chowdhry Ghulam Abbas, and Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, a traditional rival of Abdullah from Kashmir, in 1940, whose popularity was increasingly growing among the region's Muslims (Abbas 2001, 180-200). This caused a sharp decline in the popularity and influence of the National Conference.

To tackle this challenge, Abdullah's National Conference adopted a socialist-oriented constitutional document known as the Naya (new) Kashmir Manifesto in September 1944 as the objective of the party and submitted it to the Dogra regime. The manifesto, among other things, again guaranteed a socialist revolution for Kashmiri peasants, including the abolition of landlordism, land grants and chakdari, transfer of all kinds of land to the tiller, and the formation of cooperative associations (Bazaz 1954, 218; Hassnain 1988, 125). However, the National Conference again betrayed the peasants, as the manifesto was primarily adopted to revive the ebbing popularity of the Conference among the poor Kashmiri masses, while it had no real interest in liberating the poor from their socio-economic disabilities. This turned out to be true when the offer of dyarchy offered by the Dogra state in October 1944, under which two ministerial offices were to be granted to a Muslim and a Hindu who commanded the state legislature's confidence, whose majority of members were nominated by the Dogra Maharaja himself and chosen by jagirdars, landlords, and government pensioners, was accepted by the National Conference (Bazaz 1946, 29, 1954, 221-223; Saraf 1977, 598-600). As a result, Afzal Beg, the Conference's deputy leader, joined the Maharaja's cabinet when he was appointed by the Maharaja under the proposed plan of dyarchy as a Minister for Public Works. This move further alienated the poor peasantry in particular and Kashmiris in general from the National Conference, 'which, it was clear to them, was being rewarded for its compliance with the Dogra state' (Zutshi 2003, 293) and the jagirdars, landlords, and vested interests at the cost of the interests of peasants. The Conference, thus, made a mockery of its Naya Kashmir Manifesto's socialist revolutionary programme, causing widespread discontent among peasants and exploited masses in general.

### **Rise of Peasant Consciousness and Independent Peasant Resistance**

Against the above backdrop, the disillusioned members and workers of the National Conference, such as Bazaz, Abdul Salam Yatu, Ghulam Ahmad Naz, Habib-ullah Shah, Ghulam Mohammed Parey, Azad Kamal, Mohammad Sikandar Malik, Abdul Subhan, Mohammad Akram, Abdul Gani Magray, and Prithvi Nath Bhat, formed the All Jammu and Kashmir Kisan Conference in July 1945 as an independent peasant organisation to challenge the National Conference's narrative of Kashmiri nationalism and redress the problems of the Kashmiri peasantry class (Bazaz 1946, 31-33; Birdwood 1956, 172). The leaders and supporters of the Kisan Conference were largely all peasants in different areas of rural Kashmir, making it the first peasant organisation in Kashmir valley whose discourse and politics were entirely autonomous of the National Conference's 'master narrative' of Kashmiri nationalism dominated by urban upper classes. It instantly emerged as a significant organisation across the valley, particularly in rural Kashmir. Within just four months of its formation, forty-five Kisan Committees were established in over forty villages in the Anantnag area (Bazaz 1946, 31). In 1946, twenty thousand workers and peasants, together with over a hundred socialist and peasant leaders from the Kashmir region, gathered at Kabamarg, a tiny village in Anantnag district, for a historic three-day conference that resulted in the adoption of seventy-five resolutions (Bazaz 1954, 235-241; Saraf 1977, 662). These resolutions demanded the liberation of the toiling masses from the yoke of indigenous feudalism and capitalism, the abolition of absentee landlordism, chakdari and jagirdari, the distribution of land among poor peasants, the propagation of secular, socialist and democratic values, and the promotion of economic justice and social and political equality.

To poor peasants in different areas of rural Kashmir, it was now clear that the National Conference was led and dominated by elites, and its claim to be a representative of the downtrodden classes was just an empty and beguiling slogan. As a result, they enthusiastically embraced the Kisan Conference, whose leaders were themselves peasants, as their true representative body, making the National Conference disconcerted. The National Conference members and workers characterised the Kisan committees as opponents, and its 'high command made it clear to the committees that it resented the growth of the peasant movement outside its confines' (Zutshi 2003, 294; see also Bazaz 1954, 227). They, in their effort to suppress the peasant movement, derided the peasant leadership and their movement, harassed

Kisan Conference members and supporters, disrupted its meetings and rallies, and even adopted the approach of bribing the peasant workers and appealing to their religious sentiments (Hussain 2021, 58; Kant 2023, 26-27).

Meanwhile, Bazaz, who was the 'leading light' (Sathu 1952, 7) of the peasant resistance, in order to fight against the National Conference's anti-peasantry politics, proposed to widen the scope of the peasant movement and include all downtrodden and oppressed classes in its fold. He also proposed the unification of the Kisan Conference and his Kashmir Socialist Party into a united front against the National Conference and Dogra autocratic rule. Accepting Bazaz's proposals unanimously, the peasant leadership changed the name of the Kisan Conference to All Jammu and Kashmir Kisan Mazdoor Conference to represent the entire valley's downtrodden classes, with the Kashmir Socialist Party as its intellectual wing. Moreover, the party, as a coalition of peasant and socialist leaders, created a new discourse on freedom that emphasised not merely the redressal of oppressed classes' problems but, most importantly, demanded the end of the Dogra monarchy and the complete transformation of the existing economic, political and social structures on secular-socialist and democratic lines. It is worth mentioning here that the Kisan Mazdoor Conference, not the National Conference or any other organisation in the Kashmir valley, first demanded the end of the Dogra monarchy and popularised the same narrative across the region's public culture, a fact that remained buried under the National Conference's 'metanarrative' of Kashmiri nationalism. Kisan Mazdoor Conference's 'progressive' and revolutionary discourse on freedom further enhanced its support base at the grassroots level, causing a further decline in the National Conference's popularity among the common Kashmiris. The independent peasantry resistance associated with their lived experiences, however, could not succeed in deciding and shaping Kashmir's future political, economic, and social structures due to a number of reasons discussed below. Rather, the Abdullah-led National Conference turned out to be a dominant actor that shaped the future of Kashmir in the context of the Indian subcontinent's impending political transition.



### **Silence of Peasantry Alternative Voices**

Amid the growing popularity of downtrodden classes' discourse on freedom, Abdullah (2013, 256-257) started the 'Quit Kashmir' campaign against the Dogra rule in May 1946, demanding the end of the Dogra monarchy and the transfer of sovereignty to the Kashmiris. Through this campaign, Abdullah tried to hijack the discourse on freedom introduced by the Kisan Mazdoor Conference but did not succeed. Both the Kisan Mazdoor Conference and Muslim Conference and their supporters resisted the Quit Kashmir movement, characterizing it as a ploy concocted by Abdullah to revive the flagging popularity of his organization (Bazaz 1954, 254-257; Zutshi 2003, 297, 2019, 106-107). Moreover, the Congress did not support the movement, since the movement was in opposition to the All India States Peoples' Conference's objective of forming responsible governments in the states under the aegis of their Maharajas, although Jawaharlal Nehru supported it at the individual level (Hussain 2021, 59; Zutshi 2003, 297). As a result, the Quit Kashmir movement ended in failure when Abdullah, under the influence of Congress's opposition, gave up the demand of Quit Kashmir in favour of a representative responsible government under the auspices of Dogra Maharaja, bringing to light the fraudulent claims of the movement.

However, the peasant leadership could not convert the Kisan Mazdoor Conference into a viable alternative to Abdullah's National Conference and fill the void left by the latter due to the following reasons. The National Conference continuously presented itself as the only true representative body of all Kashmiri people through enticing slogans like 'nationalism' and 'Naya Kashmir'. At the same time, it tarnished the image of the peasant and socialist leaders, labelling them as opportunists and communal. In a similar vein, the Hamdard, a daily newspaper representing the voices of downtrodden classes, was characterised as a paper of the valley's Pandit minority community. Simply because the Kisan Mazdoor Conference and the Hamdard disagreed with National Conference politics does not mean that they were communal. Furthermore, the National Conference used open violent methods against the independent existence of peasant resistance. Public meetings and rallies of the Kisan Mazdoor Conference were obstinately disrupted, its leaders and supporters were publicly harassed and physically assaulted, and in general, a campaign of intimidation and terror was launched against them (Bazaz 1954, 227-242; Kant 2023, 26-27). The urban Muslim religious elites and upper classes of Kashmir in general, who largely remained aligned with the National Conference, also did

not support the Kisan Mazdoor Conference's discourse on freedom, since they were primarily interested in regaining their traditional foothold that they lost under the Dogra regime.

Most importantly, the Congress leaders, particularly Nehru, turned a blind eye to the National Conference's politics of silencing the alternative visions of Kashmiri nationalism. Throughout the 1940s, the Congress leadership, in the context of the Indian subcontinent's impending political transition, recognised the National Conference as the only representative body of all Kashmiris at the cost of the ground realities of the valley. In 1945, when the National Conference was besieged by peasant and socialist leaders, Nehru, for instance, 'exhorted Kashmiris, particularly Kashmiri Pandits, to follow the lead of the National Conference if they wanted to remain in Kashmir' (Zutshi 2003, 294). All these factors led to a forcible disappearance of peasant resistance and their discourse on freedom from Kashmir's public domain.

The final and worst blow to the peasant movement came when, in the context of the rise of the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan, the competing nationalist narratives created by India and Pakistan in relation to Kashmir gained prominence both at national and international levels, where the Kashmir identity was exclusively seen through the prism of these narratives. This relegated the lived experiences, interests and politics of the peasantry to the background, encouraging the National Conference to silence the dissenting voices under the guise of presenting itself as the guardian of Kashmir's political future surmounted by uncertainty. It was in this context that, in the early 1950s, all leading Kashmiri peasant leaders, like Bazaz, Abdul Salam Yatu, Shyam Lal Yechha, Noor Mohammed, Jagan Nath Sathu, Mir Abdul Aziz, Mohammad Sikander Malik, Arjan Nath Chaku, Pitamber Nath Fani and D. N. Bhan, were imprisoned and banished from the state for articulating their dissenting voices against Abdullah's National Conference. This led to the end of the peasant movement as an independent and autonomous force forever.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between the Kashmiri peasantry and the Kashmiri nationalism from 1930-1947 beyond the National Conference's master narrative of Kashmiri nationalism. While analysing this relationship, the article has suggested a series of important things. First, the Abdullah-led National Conference's project of Kashmiri nationalism and its politics were vociferously criticised by Kashmir's multiple actors in the 1940s. Second, the Conference readily ignored the peasant voices and interests, while claiming to be a representative of the poor peasantry. Third, the Conference was not tolerant of any opposition, and so it openly silenced the alternative discourse on freedom articulated by the Kashmiri peasantry against its ideology and politics. Lastly, peasant leadership could not convert their resistance into a viable alternative to the National Conference due to the following reasons: (a) the National Conference's politics of using enticing slogans, tarnishing the image of the peasant leaders, and using open violent methods against the independent existence of peasant resistance; (b) alignment of the urban Muslim religious elites and upper classes of Kashmir in general as well as of communists with the National Conference; (c) Congress's politics of presenting the National Conference as the only representative body of all Kashmiris; and (d) rising dominance of territorial considerations over the lived experiences and interests of Kashmiri peasantry in postcolonial India and Pakistan. The suppression of peasant voices has dealt a severe blow to the establishment and consolidation of democratic principles and institutions in Kashmir.

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## **The Millennium City & and Migrants: exploring workers' life inside modern day sweatshops in Gurgaon**

**Archana Prasad**

### **Abstract**

*Urbanization and industrialization have significantly reshaped labour markets in developing countries. Cities like Gurgaon, an industrial and financial hub in India, attract a vast number of migrant workers seeking employment opportunities. This paper aims to explore the lived experiences of these workers, focusing on their working conditions, living environments, and the systemic challenges they face. Based on the study of working and living conditions of migrant workers in export factories in the city of Gurgaon, India, the paper explores the challenges faced by migrant workers, including precarious employment, poor living conditions, and limited access to social services. All this fits well in the description of sweatshop in modern day factories. The findings reveal systemic exploitation and highlight the urgent need for policy interventions to improve the welfare and rights of migrant workers. By addressing these issues, policymakers and stakeholders can create a more equitable and just environment for all workers, regardless of their migratory status.*

**Keywords:** Migrant Workers, Sweatshops, City, Labour Rights, Discipline, Control, Recruitment, Precarious Employment, Gurgaon, India

### **Introduction**

Migration to urban centres is often driven by the promise of better economic opportunities. However, the reality for many migrant workers is characterized by precarious employment and poor living conditions (Kundu, 2009, 46). Urbanization has led to the proliferation of informal work sectors where labour laws are weakly enforced, and workers' rights are routinely violated (Breman, 2013, 89). Sweatshops are workplaces that are characterized by low wages, long hours, and unsafe working conditions (Ross, 2004, 21). Sweatshops exploit vulnerable populations, including migrant workers, who have limited bargaining power and few alternatives (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, 35). The term was used for the first time in the English garment and textile industry where due to heavy competition and falling price the employers extracted their profit from the “sweat” of the wage workers (Wetterberg, 2012, 34).

Later the term has been used to describe conditions inside the factories where there is exploitation in the form of low wage, non-payment of overtime, forced labour, extra hours of work and no social security. Such conditions were found mainly in the garment and textile factories in developing countries like China, India and Bangladesh (Mezzardi, 2016, 22; Drennan, 2015, 40 ) However in recent years there are studies document the practice of sweatshop in the fast fashion industry (Williams, 2022, 15). Term like modern day slavery is also used to describe such factories which totally ignore the human agency of workers (Hapke, 2004, 57; Wetterberg, 2012, 34). Alessandra Mezzadri (2016) has described the existence of sweatshop as a regime to highlight the difficulty in capturing the hardship faced by workers. Workers today and in the past have tolerated these conditions because that is the best work that they can get at that time in that country. Sweatshops spring up in industries where the workers are unskilled. In this sort of industry, the only thing that matters is cost. The wages are as low as to make lives of workers miserable to the extent that they cannot afford basic minimum standard of living. Besides low wages and non-payment of overtime, sweatshop conditions includes unhygienic condition, use of physical and verbal abuse, punishment, use of force to keep them intimidated and so on. Sweatshop conditions continue to persist because of it is optimal for profit making motives of TNCs (Powell and Skarbek 2006, 23). Modern day sweatshops are not the result of the laws and rules but the outcome of the deteriorating state of the economy, high unemployment and poverty, low level of skills and informalization of labour (Sinha 2017, 60). The root cause of the persistence of sweatshop in India is the policy towards restructuring employment and the wide pool of 'reserve army of labour' (Seymour 2012, 40). The persistence of sweatshop in modern factories in city of Gurgaon is demonstrated through a survey of the working conditions inside the factories.

A survey of the export factories located in Gurgaon reveals that the conditions of migrant workers are dismissal. The findings of the study suggest that labour regulation in these factories is a mechanism of the '*name and shame*' strategy and is like a fig leaf hiding abusive treatment of workers, mostly migrants. Today, in the system of global supply chain where both capital and labour are flexible, there is an imbalance between demand and supply which puts workers under pressure to produce maximum at minimum costs. The manufacturers in India who are part of the supply chain take benefit of international completion, ineffective state regulatory

system and cheap and unorganized workers. The outsourcing of production has increased the contract, casual and migrant workers leading to fragmentation and flexibilization of the workforce (White 2004, 59).

### **Exploring working conditions inside a factory**

This section does an analysis of the working conditions inside the factories give enough evidences to suggest that these factories are modern day sweatshops. The focus is on modes of recruitment, use of discipline and control to regulate workers behaviour and the absence of collective bargaining rights. All these together have made workers docile and unorganised; they are left to themselves to struggle for their rights at the workplace in the city.

### **Recruitment- modes of recruitment**

In the factories several modes of recruitment are used to hire workers. I have classified the modes of recruitment into two categories:

- i. Formal- direct recruitment through interview
- ii. Informal- through contacts in the factory- workers, supervisor or manager & through contractors and sub-contractors

The study found out that the direct mode of recruitment is used by and large to recruit permanent and skilled workers. In general the notice of the vacant post is pasted on the gates of the factories and no advertisements are made in the newspaper or social media. People reading these notices and having the required skills appear for interview and provide a demo of the work to be done. They are allowed to work for a trial period and if their work is found proper they get selected. Recruitment through contact and through contractors and sub-contractors is used to recruit semi-skilled and unskilled workers. It was found in the course of the study that many of the supervisors in factory are also contractors. They get their co-villagers to work in the same factory and some of them also become landlords by keeping the workers as tenants. Since the semi-skilled and unskilled workers constitute a larger proportion of the workforce. The use of informal mode of recruitment through workers and supervisors laid stress on the use of kinship ties. The ties of relatedness are used for getting workers who are more loyal, committed and fewer chances of them organizing collective action against the management.



### **Discipline & control**

Post liberalisation with the restructuring of manufacturing, most export factories in developing countries function as gated communities with restricted entries to outsiders. A visit to any of the factory will give the picture of a multi-storeyed building with huge iron gates and security guards with guns. The gates of these factories open only in the morning and evening for entry and exit of workers, the rest of the time there is a big lock on the gate. Anyone desirous of entry has to give identity proof or take permission from the management. Even representatives of national, state or local trade union are not allowed to enter or meet workers and hence no presence of trade union in these factories.

Inside the factory there is complete discipline and control on the factory floor with workers working in complete silence as there are several supervisors monitoring their work. There is limited or no communication with co-workers or outsider during production time. The only time workers can talk is the lunch and tea-break which is of half-hour to one hour. If workers are seen talking among themselves, the supervisor not only scolds them but also gives them warning of deducting their wage. Workers have to take permission from the supervisor for going to toilet. This at times causes problem among women workers who feel embarrassed to ask supervisors, who are mostly men, permission to use the toilet. In the FGD, many women workers shared their problem of having health issues because of not going to toilet for several hours while working. One of the women workers shared her problem:

*'I feel bit ashamed to go and tell the supervisor that I have to go to the toilet. He gives a very bad look and if anyone goes to him more than twice or thrice he uses abusive words saying that we are here only for going to toilet. This stops me from going to toilet as a result I have fallen ill many times'.*

Many male workers were apprehensive in sharing information while doing interviews in the factories but in their residence they were more open and had a lot to talk. The reason for this was that many of the factories take the service of local goons (local thugs) to create a fearful environment in the factories. Two reasons for doing this are, first to keep the workers intimidated so that workers do not demand more wages and overtime payment and second to prevent workers from protesting. Workers are also given punishments in the form of physical or verbal abuse if they protest or demand anything from the management. In the FGDs many

workers complained that even though they like the work they are doing, the work environment is not at all healthy and friendly.

Most workers are afraid even to talk about any abuse they face inside the factory. After lot of pestering and request in one of the FGD, a male worker narrated his experience of being violently abused:

*'In the month of June, which is a lean period, I did not get my wage till 18<sup>th</sup>, so I went to the supervisor and asked him about it. He told me that the owner has some financial problem and will not pay the wages this month. I was very annoyed and threatened him about raising the issue with the factory owner. The supervisor got angry and called the security guard who slapped me and asked me to work without making any noise or leave the job. My family lives with me so I had no option but continue working. I got half the wage in the next month'.*

Another method of discipline and control by the factory owners is to use the landlords, who are also contractors and supervisors in the factory, to stop giving ration on credit, ask them to vacate the house and make full payment etc. Since the workers are on debt and not in a position to repay, they have no option but accept the terms and condition of landlords and factory owners.

The use of abusive language and physical assault is part of the lives of the workers and the intensity increases during peak production period. The workers become a mere clog in the machine are treated inhumanly. Punishment is given for coming late even by 10mins, not completing the target assigned or refusing to do overtime work. A case was reported in the media of a worker being brutally being beaten by the guards and HR manager for coming late by 15min. He was beaten so badly that he suffered from injuries and broken ribs<sup>i</sup>. One such incidence was narrated by a worker;

*'I came later to work only by 10 min but when the manager came to working area, the supervisor complained that I was late by half an hour. On listening to this the manager grabbed my collar and slapped me thrice in front of all my co-workers. The entire day I felt sad and depressed and depressed but had to work because if I did not complete the order I would get worse punishmen'.*

Besides verbal abuse and physical assault factory owners take recourse to other means of disciplining and controlling the workers, like late payment of monthly wage, deduction from

wage, extra overtime work without any payment, deleting records from attendance register and so on. These punishments came out in the interview with an experienced worker. He said:

*'There are many ways of punishing workers, deduction of wage if not able to fulfill the production target. Asking workers to do more overtime but not paying for the extra work and not showing on record the total hours worked. They meddle with records and attendance register to <sup>ii</sup>show less numbers of working days so that payment of wages is less'.*

In the informal interviews and FGDs workers shares their experience of workplace violence in the form of verbal abuse, deduction of wages, more overtime work without pay, threat by boxers of physical abuse, warning of being fired/thrown out of job, physical abuse and beatings etc. The experience of these different forms of violence suggests that workers are merely seen as machine for fulfilling production orders and not as human beings by the employers.

### **Denial of Collective Bargaining Rights**

The Right to freedom of association has been identified as one of the four core labour right by ILO (International Labour Organization) and by labour law of the country. It refers to the right to form or join organization of without interference by the employer. Freedom of association and the right to organize are also described in Article 19 of the Indian constitution and protected by the Trade Union Act 1926, which allows any seven workers to form a union and protect union against civil and criminal prosecution arising out of disputes. However despite legal statue these rights remain a distant dream for workers in these factories. They have neither the right to neither join nor participate in any collective activities which becomes a threat for the employers (Prasad 2018, 178). The extremely repressive environment in terms of freedom of association is also expressed by the fact that there is not one single registered trade union in the garment sector in Gurgaon

Any attempt to form trade union or take part in organized labour movement is taken very seriously by the management. All means from firing workers, delaying or deducting payment to use of violence and force to curb such activities is part of the manufacturing factories in Gurgaon. A large number of cases of suppression of labour protests have been reported by media from several factories. Two of the most devastating suppressions have been the arrest of workers in Rico and in Maruti Suzuki incidents.

1. *Strikes at Rico (2009)* - The 44 days strike by the workers demanding right to form trade union was violently curbed by the management by hiring local goons to murder a worker outside the factory gate. The charges of murder were put on the striking workers and the management in connivance with police got the workers arrested and their leader was forced to resign. This incident highlights the use of violence by the management to instil fear among workers to the extent that they do not take part in any form trade union activities.

2. *Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant (2012)*-This is the most glaring incidents of the use of violence to curb any attempt to form trade union. The management took help of bouncers and police to crackdown on striking workers. Those who fear to initiate any organized activities have to bear the brunt of employer by being forced to resign or get arrested by police.

Similar cases have been reported from other firms like Modelma exports, Denso, Sunbeam, Bosch, Napino, Senior India, Bajaj Motors, etc. In most cases factory management put false allegation and charges on workers who are then put into prison. Due to these threats and intimidations, trade union has become an alien term to a large majority of workers. As per the data collected, a large number, that is 84 per cent, workers are not heard the term or pretend to be ignorant about it. Most workers have only heard the term but are not sure what means or why it is formed. 77.4 per cent workers do not know what trade union means. Among those who have heard or are aware of any union only 4 per cent are willing to join or take membership and remaining feel that the employer will take care of their grievances.

### **Violence & Labour Unrest\***

A large number of accidents have been taking place in factories in the recent years. These accidents are testimony to the vulnerable lives of the workers who make significant contribution to India's economy. Below is a brief description of some of the violent accidents and unrest that have occurred in factories located in Udyog Vihar in the last decade. Details of these have been taken from Gurgaon Workers News, newspaper and internet materials.

1. *Workers protest at Liberty Footwear (2006)* - A clash between police and workers who were protesting against low wage and non-payment of bonus. They blocked the National Highway leading to long traffic jam. The workers pelted stone on the police who retaliated with lathi-charge. In the clash more than 30 people were injured.

2. *Riot at Orient Craft Riot (2014)* - The news of the death of a worker inside the factory due to an electric shock led to a rebellion by hundreds of workers on the street outside the factory. Soon workers from other factories in the vicinity joined the protest. On complaint filed by group of factory owners, the police barricaded the areas to prevent further assemblage of workers. There was clash between police, management and workers and in violence many policemen, women and men workers lost their lives. Cases were registered against the workers for rioting and causing violence in the city.

3. Violence at Richa (2013). The high level of exploitations and oppression of workers compelled them to take recourse to violent action like burning of cars, smashing of company property and even the killing of a supervisor (Chakraborty 2014, 180).

These violent labour unrests suggest that there has been a shift in modus operandi of protest by the working class in India. In the period welfare state, labour conditions were regulated by tripartite agreements and meetings in which workers representation through trade union was included. With the demise of collective bargaining rights and the state withdrawing from its welfare activities workers' frustration come out in form of violence. These strikes as seen from the examples above are not industry centered but cuts across sector and industries and both formal and informal workers jointly take part in these protests.

### **Precarity & Precarious conditions**

The 3Ds, dirty, demeaning and dangerous can be best used to describe migrant workers in the city of Gurgaon. The increase in number and intensity of violent labour unrests in the recent years portrays the dismal state of workers and working conditions in Gurgaon. The frequency of violence is preemptive of precarity and precarious condition of neoliberal capitalism (Dasgupta 2019, 33). The conditions of the workers in factories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be best described holistically with the use of the term, precariat, which implies exploitation, oppression and violence (Standing, 2011, 15). This is well explained by looking at the ways in which sweatshops continues to impact the lives of workers, despite private regulation being in place for more than three decades. From the above analysis the conditions of the factories fits into the features of sweatshop have been discussed. These conditions include:

- i. Low wage- a large percentage of workers who are informal and unskilled are not paid by the principal employer but by their contractor who deducts their commission from the wage of the workers
- ii. Long working hours- Workers have to work for 18 to 21 hours to complete production order and most of the time not paid for the extra work.
- iii. Physical and verbal abuse and punishment for coming late, not doing work as per the demands, going to the toilet and coming later for work
- iv. Fear and intimidation by security guards, local thugs, land-lords and supervisors so that they do not participate in any form of organized or collective movement.
- v. Irregular employment so as to avoid payment of social security benefits to workers
- vi. Low employment of married women as permanent workers in order to avoid providing maternity facilities at the workplace.
- vii. Discrimination against women workers by throwing them out of job if they get pregnant.
- viii. Granting no permission to workers to form trade union or take membership in any union.  
The use of police and state apparatus to curb the right to form any union.

These conditions impact the lives of the workers in multiple ways in terms of poor health, increase risk of injuries and death, increase in alienation and isolation of workers and son. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle of poverty and marginalization (Deshingkar, 2006, 96). All this fits well in the description of modern slavery, though workers are different from traditional forms of slavery as they have the legal freedom to leave job and move out of the violent environment. However fear, intimidation and extreme poverty makes them fixed to exploitative employers. Though they are mistreated, exploited and abused they have no option to return back to their native village and hence continue to work under conditions of precarity. Chains of guns and weapons of old slavery has been replaced by vulnerability and vicious circle of poverty and exploitations.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for comprehensive policy interventions to address the systemic exploitation of migrant workers. Policymakers should prioritize the enforcement of labor laws and the provision of social services to improve the welfare of

migrant workers (ILO, 2017, 55). Additionally, there is a need for greater regulation of labor brokers and middlemen to protect workers from exploitation (Banerjee, 2016, 120).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve the conditions of migrant workers in Gurgaon:

- i. **Strengthening Labor Law Enforcement:** Ensuring that labor laws are effectively enforced and that violators are held accountable is crucial for protecting workers' rights (Sharma, 2006, 67).
- ii. **Improving Access to Social Services:** Providing migrant workers with access to essential social services, including healthcare, education, and legal aid, can help improve their quality of life and reduce marginalization (NCEUS, 2007, 88).
- iii. **Regulating Labor Brokers:** Implementing regulations to control the activities of labor brokers and middlemen can help prevent exploitation and reduce the indebtedness of migrant workers (Srivastava, 2011, 110).
- iv. **Promoting Workers' Rights Awareness:** Educating migrant workers about their rights and providing them with access to legal aid can empower them to challenge unfair labor practices and seek redress (Bhattacharjee, 2001, 130).

### **Conclusion**

This research paper has explored the existence of modern-day sweatshops in the city of Gurgaon, India. The findings reveal systemic exploitation and highlight the urgent need for policy interventions to improve the welfare and rights of migrant workers. By addressing these issues, policymakers and stakeholders can create a more equitable and just environment for all workers, regardless of their migratory status.

### **Endnote**

\* Information on violence and labour unrest has been taken from  
<https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no2/#fn18source->

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## A Brief Review of Capital Expenditure in Indian Agriculture

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### Abstract

*This article has attempted to provide a systematic review of various issues related to Capital Expenditure in Agriculture of India. A continuous growth in private capital formation in the 1990s offset a downward trend observed in public capital formation in agriculture throughout the 1980s, which had been the main cause of the decline in agricultural capital expenditure. Private and governmental capital spending in agriculture have a complementary relationship, however, due to the compositional differences in both the series, private and public investment in agriculture cannot be used a replacement for the other. Many studies have demonstrated that there is significant regional disparity in India with regard to capital expenditure in agriculture, with the northeastern area having lower levels of capital formation in agriculture on both a state and private basis. With the wearing down of the effects of the green revolution and many of the Agriculturally developed states reaching a state of plateau in terms of production and productivity, many studies have suggested channelizing investment towards the Eastern and North Eastern States for these states have greater potential in terms of higher capital use efficiency and achieving higher productivity. One of the Northeastern states, Assam have lower rates of agricultural capital formation from the public and private sectors. However, few efforts have so far been made to analyse the trend and pattern of capital formation in regional agriculture and no study has so far attempted to analyse the underlying causes of such lower levels of capital formation in agriculturally backward states of the country.*

**Key words:** Capital Expenditure, Agriculture, Public investment, Private investment.

### Introduction

The ongoing debate among the researchers surrounding the question why the growth rate in Indian agriculture has been experiencing a decline since the 1990s has compelled them to look into the various underlying factors behind this decline (Gandhi, 1990); (Shetty, 1990); (Mallick, 1993); (Mishra & Chand, 1995); (Dhawan & Yadav, 1995). Among other reasons the decline in public investment in agriculture has been attributed much weight and has continued the interest of the researchers on the complementary relationship that was found during the 1980s between public and private investment in agriculture. This renewed interest has prompted researchers to look into the definitional, methodological issues and other neglected dimensions in this regard.

The term "capital formation" refers to the process by which society allocates a portion of its current productive activity toward the creation of capital goods, such as machinery and transportation facilities, tools and instruments, plant and equipment, and other real capital that has the potential to greatly boost the efficiency of productive effort, rather than using it all to satisfy the needs and desires of immediate consumption. The phrase can be used to refer to both human and material capital; it can be expanded to encompass investments in knowledge, training, and health, which are crucial types of investments (Nurkse, 1980).

A net addition to the current stock of capital goods, which includes both non-material commodities like knowledge, technical skill, and people's health and material capital like machines, tools, plants, instruments, and buildings, is what is commonly referred to as capital formation (Singh, 2007). Despite certain differences, the phrases "investment" and "capital formation" are sometimes used synonymously. Capital formation, according to the National Account Statistics, is the accounting value of non-financial created asset additions to the capital stock less asset disposals. Whereas, investment is a more general term that covers the acquisition of any type of capital item that generates income in the future, whether it be financial or physical (Bathla, 2014, p. 19-36).

Capital formation is of two types when distinguished by institutions, i.e., public capital formation and private capital formation. Public investments in agriculture are often synonymously with public sector gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in agriculture, as defined in the National Accounts Statistics (NAS) of the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) of India. By this definition, which uses the asset-based approach as well as the industry-of-use approach, public-sector GFCF in agriculture comprises primarily (almost 90 percent) the irrigation projects undertaken by the Departmental Commercial Undertakings. The Non-Departmental Commercial Undertakings contributes a minor amount through irrigation, horticulture, livestock, and development of state farms (Fan and Gulati, 2017). In recent times, however, independent researchers Gulati and Bathla (2002); Chand (2001, p. 162-184); Mogues et al. (2015, p. 337-352) have broadened the concept of public investment in agriculture by distinguishing it as investment "in" agriculture which primarily refers to the investments that have direct impact on the growth and development of agriculture (such as animal and soil husbandry, research and development, extension services, irrigation, and rural infrastructure etc.) and investment "for" agriculture includes the infrastructural requirements of the sector such as rural roads-transport, energy, health, education, rural industry, telecommunications etc. which indirectly contributes to the growth and development of the sector.

Private capital formation constitutes those reproducible assets and improvement in quality of existing assets, which are derived from investment made by household and corporate sector including both organized and unorganized sectors (Singh, 2007).

The presence of externalities, high risk and uncertainty prevailing in agriculture has enunciated the role of government expenditure since the inception of the first five-year plan. A stable trend of government expenditure is crucial for sustaining the growth of agricultural sector. Many studies have revealed that inability to maintain such stability can have adverse effects on the development of the agricultural growth. Selvaraj (1993, p. 1-13) constructed an instability index to measure the same and found an inverse relationship between unstable public investment and agricultural growth. In addition to that, the experience of green revolution has confirmed the role of government expenditure for agricultural growth. Furthermore, in recent times subsidies to agriculture has turned out to be unproductive, financially unsustainable and environment damaging, and has become the cause of increased inequality among the rural Indian states. The key to maintaining long-term increase in agricultural productivity is investing in rural infrastructure, education, non-farm activities, and agricultural research and development (Fan and Gulati, 2017). Although the role is well established, the challenge remains in targeting the public expenditure in the right direction for attaining maximum gains. Since, agriculture is a state subject, its growth largely depends on the expenditure policies adopted by the respective states and therefore a wide disparity is witnessed among the Indian states in terms of capital formation in agriculture and agricultural growth (Singh et al., 2011). She has identified Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka to be the states spending large amounts for agriculture sector. Whereas, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal are some of the states lagging behind in the same. Furthermore, investment in agriculture and allied sector is crucial for increasing agricultural production and income, reducing poverty and enhancing food security both at the national and household levels.

This paper is mainly based on extensive literature survey.

### **Trends in Capital Expenditure in Agriculture**

The gradual decline in the agricultural growth in the country has been linked to the gradual decline in the public investment in agriculture and diverting the resources towards input subsidies (Bathla, 2017, p. 101-116). In addition to that many researchers have pointed out reassessing the returns from different components of public expenditure in agriculture and emphasizing the regional needs and channelising public investment in accordance with such needs. A detailed analysis of the trends in agricultural capital

formation is expected to help the policymakers in understanding the previous pattern and decide on future changes to be made accordingly. The time series data on Capital formation in Agriculture from 1960-61 to 1987-88 revealed that gross capital formation in agriculture at 1980-81 prices, which experienced a steady growth during the 1960s lost its momentum during the first half of the 1970s; thereafter it again gained momentum during the second half of the decade and achieved the peak level of over Rs. 5,200 crores during 1978-79 and 1979-80. But during the subsequent period of seven years up to 1987-88, there was a sharp decline in real gross capital formation in agriculture (Shetty, 1990, p. 389-398).

Mallick (1993, p. 667-676) using a semi-log model calculated the growth rates of Gross Capital Formation in Agriculture (GCFAGR), Public Gross Capital Formation in Agriculture and Private Gross Capital Formation in agriculture for the period 1960-61 to 1989-90. GCFAGR as share of Aggregate Gross Capital Formation (AGGRGCF) in the economy as a whole reflected some sluggishness during the 90s. The steady growth of AGGRGCF during the same period has been linked to inadequate attention in terms of agricultural investment at the macro level. The decline in public investment during the 1980s has mainly been attributed to large proportion of total resource flows to current expenditures on subsidies for fertilisers, irrigation, electricity, credit and other agricultural inputs. This necessitated a gradual reduction in the level of current expenditures and the released resources to be invested in high potential avenues.

Mishra & Chand (1995, p. 64-79) using broad definition of Agriculture, i.e., encompassing (i) Agriculture and allied, (ii) Fisheries and (iii) forestry and logging and based on CSO data have estimated the trends in gross fixed capital formation in agriculture. Taking three years moving averages of GCF at 1980-81 prices since 1960-61 and removing the years with outliers revealed that public capital formation continued to increase at annual growth rate of 5 percent up to mid-1970s, which accelerated during the second half of the 1970s to 12 percent, reaching a peak in 1982-83 and thereafter declining at a 4 to 5 percent until the end of the decade. A change in the political economics of agricultural policies in the following years and the success of the green revolution have been blamed for the reduction in Public GCF. There arose a tendency among the politically powerful farmers to push for increasing current expenditure for production subsidies and increasing finance for private sector capital formation through subsidized loans. Whereas, private capital formation grew at a rate of 7 percent up to mid-70s, and declined to 4 percent during the second half. However, an important limitation of the CSO data is that although it gives a break up of GCF separately for public, private and household sector; the estimation of GCF for the household sector may be an underestimate as the change in stock of inventories pertain to change in stock of livestock only. The underestimation of the GCF in the private sector during the 1980s can be attributed to the omission of

supplies and materials, ongoing projects, and products owned by farming households during the accounting period. In view of this fact, the decline in private sector capital formation during the 1980s should not be concluded taking the face value of the CSO estimates.

The issue with estimations of the private household sector's GFCF is that it is based on Reserve Bank of India's All India Debt and Investment Survey, 1981-82 which is a decennial survey. In order to account for the intervening years, the interpolation and extrapolation approach is employed, utilizing the cost index of non-residential construction works in rural and urban areas on top of the combined index of agricultural and industrial production. These flaws are present in the estimations of gross and net fixed capital stock in agriculture since the Perpetual Inventory Method (PIM) is used to estimate the latter from the former. In addition to that, the effects of the changes in the age structure in the age structure of capital stock are not included is estimation of GFCF (Mishra, 1996, p. 193-208). Although the behaviour of the public sector investment can somewhat be easily explained as it is exogenously determined by the government policies, Mishra (1996, p. 193-208) suggested surveying the same set of households at different points of time and generating a panel data to study the investment behaviour of the private households.

Gandhi (1996, p. 543-558) using the data from 1950-51 to 1992-93 in 1980-81 constant prices on Public and Private Capital formation revealed that the private component has been dominating total capital formation throughout the years. Following the green revolution public investment which experienced a considerable increase, experienced a decline during 1980s which continued into the 1990s. This decline however started much before the liberalisation. Private investment which experienced some fluctuations as well as a decline up to the mid-1980s, increased substantially into the early 90s. The sharp increase in private investment during the late 90s and into the 90s helped in overcoming the negative growth experienced by public investment. These structural changes are observed in public and private capital investment in Indian Agriculture.

Gulati and Bathla (2001, p. 1697-1708) has analysed the behaviour of gross capital formation in agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors from 1960 to 1998 at 1993-94 prices. A steady increase in the GCFA is observed during 1960-61 to 1978-79 from 63 billion to 192 billion. Then a decline was observed up to 1986-87 and a recovery in 1998-99 with an increase up to 190 billion. Thus, the trend has been quite stagnant over this 20 years period. When decomposed into public and private capital formation, a decline is observed in the public component since the early 1980s which continued till 1990s, while the private component experienced a decline only until 1986-87, which thereafter continued to increase and accelerated from 1993-

94 onwards. During the period 1980-81 to 1998-99, the share of private component in the total capital formation increased from 49 percent to 75 percent.

### **Complementarity Between Public and Private Capital Expenditure**

Government or public investment stimulates or discourages private investment. The "crowding in" effect of public investment refers to this stimulating occurrence, while the "crowding out" effect refers to the phenomenon of impeding private investment. Although the "crowding out" effect is witnessed in the industrial sector, "crowding in" effect is prominent in Indian agriculture. Macroeconomic theory, which contextualizes more public investment to "crowd in" private investment, is the source of the positive link expected between public and private investments in agriculture. The term 'complementarity' has been the chosen choice for Indian agricultural economists to characterize the positive relationship between state and private fixed capital formation in Indian agriculture at the macro level (Dhawan & Yadav, 1996, p.103-109). However, Mishra and Chand (1995, p. 64-79) have stated that by definition complementarity mean the act of being and working together to produce a particular outcome which cannot be attained in the absence of the either of them and complementarity does not stand for a causal relationship. In the Indian context, the evidence for this is found to be conflicting. Gandhi (1990, p. 47-82); Shetty (1990, p. 389-398); Dhawan (1996) and Mishra and Chand (1995, p. 64-79) have found strong relation between the two. However, studies like Mishra (1996, p. 193-208) have refuted the existence of such a complementary relationship.

Rao (1998, p. 1943-1948) pointed out that the debate on existence of a complementary relation between public and private investment would not have arisen if the limitations of the data on public investment in agriculture as given by the National Account Statistics have been taken into account. Over 90 per cent of the reported investment relates to major and medium irrigation projects by state governments. This does not include the investment made for rural roads, power, storage structures and agricultural research which are by and large important capital investment for agriculture. Hence Public investment is underestimated and thus the failure of some of the studies to find this complementary relation.

Public investments in irrigation constitute a large share in total public investment in agriculture in India. Reduction in their magnitude explains the deceleration in private fixed capital formation during the 1980s and thus the complementarity thesis can't be given up in favour of the substitutability thesis between public and private capital formation (Dhawan & Yadav, 1995, p. 103-109).

Sawant et al. (2002, p. 1068-1072) have pointed out that the previous works which established the complementary relationship between public and private investment in agriculture was more in technical sense. He has identified two important aspects that should be considered while analysing this relationship. Firstly, the use of these two components as substitutes of each other in strict sense is wrong due to the significant compositional differences. The public component included major and medium irrigation works, market yards if used in narrow sense and included rural roads and electrification if a broader meaning was used, whereas, the private component included mechanisation, land levelling, private minor irrigation etc. Secondly, previous works have limited their analysis at the macro level and has ignored the regional dimension.

### **Regional disparity in Capital Expenditure**

Private fixed capital formation during 1980s were extremely low for eastern states of Orissa, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal and the states like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Maharashtra experienced high levels of the same. The gravity of the issue is magnified due to the large differences in terms of private fixed capital formation between these two categories of states (Dhawan & Yadav, 1995, p. 103-109).

The green revolution of the 1960s were limited to the high potential northern states of India having a well-developed infrastructural base. The reasoning behind this was that, compared to less favoured areas, investments in high potential areas yield more agricultural output and growth at a lower cost (Fan & Hazell, 1999). However, a) the failure of previous patterns of agricultural growth to address the issues of growing poverty and food insecurity in many less-favourable locations calls into question the justification for ignoring the less-favourable areas; b) There is mounting evidence that productivity growth in many high-potential industries is stagnating (Pingali and Rosegrant, 1998, p. 628-634); and c) increasing evidence that, in certain less-favourable regions, the correct investments can raise agricultural production to substantially greater levels than previously believed levels (Scherr and Hazell, 1994). Bathla (2017, p. 101-116) calculated incremental capital output ratios (ICOR) for the states and found that the less developed states like Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and West Bengal were estimated to have low ICOR, research suggested that, in contrast to developed states with high ICOR values like Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Odisha, a minor increase in capital would result in a higher additional income.

Investment on public account in Agriculture which is generally used synonymously with Public Capital Formation is considered to be an exogenous variable as its size and pattern is largely determined by the government policies towards agriculture. Furthermore, since agriculture is a state subject, public capital



formation at the state level depends on the state specific agricultural policies and the financial position of the state. Towards the end of 2000s, many states have registered a commendable growth in public capital formation. However, states like Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala have registered public Gross capital Formation in Agriculture below the national average (Bathla, 2017, p. 101-116). If the broader definition of public GCFA is taken into consideration, it was found that the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh had the highest levels of public GCFA in irrigation (Bathla, 2014, p. 19-36).

The extent of Fixed Capital Formation in Agriculture (FCFA) on the private account is diverse across the country. Distribution of income and wealth is one of the major determinants of such disparity. The proportion of cultivator households undertaking such investments tend to rise with the asset position of a household. Ownership right to land is another dominant component and one can easily assert that the rising pattern in FCFA is fundamentally land size determined. In addition to that the inter-state disparity witnessed in FCFA is found to be correlated with the allocative preference of the farmers. India has a varied topography and climate, hence there is a regional component to the country's investment preferences. Preference for irrigation is considerably low in the high rainfall states like Assam, West Bengal and Orissa and in hilly states like Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir as compared to their counterparts in low rainfall states of western India (Rajasthan and Gujarat), medium rainfall states of southern India (Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) and Maharashtra south-western India (Dhawan & Yadav, 1995, p. 103-109).

The needs of Indian farmers with regard to fixed capital, operating capital, and other specific consumer needs are largely satisfied by borrowing money. Both institutional and non-institutional credit plays a crucial role in determining the size of FCFA. Many studies Dhawan & Yadav (1995, p. 103-109); Mallick (1993, p. 667-676); Gandhi (1990, p. 47-82) have revealed a significant positive relation between institutional borrowing and FCFA on private account.

In addition to the availability of credit another significant aspect associated with credit is the price of credit, i.e. the interest rate. The borrowing behaviour of the farmers is largely determined by the rate of interest charged on borrowed loan. Gandhi (1990, p. 47-82) revealed in an environment of credit scarcity, the price of credit is an important determinant governing investment behaviour. A negative relation between the two is established in many studies (Dhawan & Yadav, 1995, p. 103-109).

## Concluding Remarks

In India, the post-green revolution era is marked by high input consumption and slowing development in total factor productivity. The high agricultural productivity attained during the 1980s as an after effect of green revolution did not sustain during the 90s. The continued increase in input levels to maintain the current levels of yield has been a matter of concern both from economic viability and sustainability issues. There have been declining returns on agricultural output in many areas, and the total factor productivity of a sizable section of the gross cultivated area has either stagnated or grown negatively.

Due to over irrigation, issues with water logging and soil salinity may eventually arise in many irrigation project regions (Kumar & Mittal, 2006, p. 71-88).

Although it is well acknowledged that public investments can increase productivity, in order to get the most return on investment, the kind and direction of these investments must be decided. Investments in roads, agricultural extension services, irrigation, and agricultural research have the most effects on growth and revenue (Joshi & Kumar, 2014, p. 50-56). Similarly, during the time of the green revolution until 1993, public spending on R&D, irrigation, roads, and education increased production and reduced poverty (Fan et al., 1999); (Fan et al., 2008, p. 163-170). Higher payoffs from incremental expenditure on roads, irrigation, and education coupled with spending on energy, health, rural development, and irrigation subsidies are validated by an updated analysis conducted through 2013–14. Higher payoffs from incremental expenditure on roads, irrigation, and education coupled with spending on energy, health, rural development, and irrigation subsidies are validated by an updated analysis conducted through 2013–14 (Bathla, 2017, p. 101-116). The Indian government has been spending more and more on research and development, but the distribution of resources has been unequal, with the western and southern regions receiving the majority of research funds while the hill and eastern regions have received less attention (Singh, 2011). In addition to this, expenditure on extension services need to be designed according to region specific needs.

As mentioned earlier, Indian agriculture suffers from large regional variations in terms of production and capital formation. Per hectare public investment is below the national average in the states like Odisha, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and Kerala. States like Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab have made significant advances in private investment due to the availability of better credit facilities. For the majority of economic services, however, revenue returns from increased public spending are generally larger in less developed states than in high-income states. In order to face the challenges of future agricultural growth,

public investments in less developed and rain-fed regions must be increased, while developed states typically exhibit diminishing marginal returns from new public investments. In the eastern and rain-fed states, a lower incremental capital output ratio suggests higher returns on new investments (NCAER, New Delhi).

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## Instagram and Sustainable Fashion: Exploring Thrift Shopping among the Youth in Assam

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### Abstract

*The impact of social media in our decision-making processes cannot be overstated, particularly in its role of exposing individuals to a diverse array of ideas, opinions, and viewpoints from various sources. As platforms such as Instagram are becoming more popular, there is an increasing interest in understanding their impact on promoting ideas such as sustainable fashion. As the youth constitute the primary demographic of social media users, this research specifically delves into impact of Instagram on youths of Assam on endorsing thrift fashion, a practice aligned with sustainable fashion principles. The study examines how Assamese youths leverage Instagram to disseminate awareness about sustainable fashion and cultivate enthusiasm for thrift shopping. In doing so, the research contributes valuable insights that deepen our understanding of sustainable fashion consumption within the ever-evolving landscape of social media.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Sustainable fashion, Instagram, Thrift Fashion, Thrift Shopping

### Introduction

The definition of sustainable fashion is multifaceted and has evolved over time. Sustainable fashion is defined as ‘clothing, shoes, and accessories that are manufactured, marketed, and used in the most sustainable manner possible, taking into account both environmental and socio-

economic aspects' (Fletcher 2013, 27). This definition emphasizes the holistic nature of sustainability, considering environmental impact alongside social and economic factors.

Sustainable fashion has emerged as a crucial movement within the clothing industry, aiming to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of garment production and consumption. Scholars have extensively examined various aspects of sustainable fashion, ranging from its definitions to its implementation strategies. Sustainable fashion or eco-fashion is a broad term, it is an umbrella term which comprises thrift fashion, products made of organic and eco-friendly materials, animal cruelty free products etc. Thrift fashion is a growing trend where consumers purchase second-hand clothing from thrift stores or online marketplaces, rather than buying new items. This trend has been fueled by concerns over sustainability and the environmental impact of fast fashion. However, there are also possible factors that can encourage someone to pursue this fashion like pocket friendly, influencers, material etc.

Social media plays a vital role in exposing individuals to a variety of ideas, opinions, and viewpoints from various sources. Understanding how sustainable fashion is promoted on social media and how users interact with such content, deciding whether to adopt or reject associated concepts and practices, is essential. Existing literature underscores the influential role of social media in promoting sustainable fashion. It is in this context that the study examines the influence of social media, particularly among the youth in Assam, in promoting sustainable fashion. The primary focus is on understanding user interactions with content related to sustainable fashion, with a specific emphasis on the platform Instagram. The study delves into the factors associated with Instagram that contribute to the promotion of thrift shopping, a practice aligned with sustainable fashion principles. By concentrating on Instagram, the research aims to unveil insights

into how this social media platform plays a pivotal role in advocating and fostering sustainable fashion practices, particularly through thrift shopping.

## **Literature review**

### **The need for Sustainable Fashion**

According to the UN Environment Programme (“UN Alliance Aims to Put Fashion on Path to Sustainability | UNECE” 2018), ‘The fashion business is responsible for 10% of world emissions, consumes 79 trillion liters of water, pollutes approximately 20% of industrial water, releases 190,000 tons of microplastics into the ocean and delivers roughly 92 million tons of textile waste to landfill annually.’ An average household discards 30 kg of clothing each year, according to study. Statistics reveal that the fashion industry produces 10% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emission. The emergence of global fashion brands such as H&M, Topshop, and Zara in the early twenty-first century revolutionized the fashion industry by providing consumers with trendy, short-cycle, and relatively inexpensive clothing; this production and promotion of cheap and readily available "disposable" clothing is referred to as fast fashion. The trend toward sustainable fashion has encouraged many brands to use brand transparency and fair-trade materials and fabrics. In an effort to draw in conscientious customers, many firms have begun including terms like organic, ethical and sustainable into their marketing tactics.

A study by Rita Kant explores the historical significance of color in fabrics and the evolution of the synthetic dye industry, dating back to WH Perkins' discovery in 1856. While synthetic dyes have revolutionized the textile industry by offering a broad spectrum of color options, the paper draws attention to the environmental concerns associated with their usage. The presence of harmful



chemicals creates a considerable risk to diverse life forms. In essence, the paper underscores the dual characteristics of synthetic dyes, offering vivid colors while simultaneously presenting significant hazards to both the environment and public health (Kant 2012).

The environmental impact of the fashion industry has been a focal point in numerous studies. A similar study highlights the detrimental effects of textile production on water usage, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions (Fletcher and Tham 2015, 21). To counter these issues, sustainable fashion practices such as use of organic materials, recycling, and reducing waste have gained attention (Fletcher and Grose 2012). Understanding consumer behavior is crucial in promoting sustainable fashion. Consumers are increasingly conscious of the environmental and social impacts of their clothing choices. However, challenges persist in translating this awareness into consistent ethical consumption habits (Jung et al. 2016).

According to Olivia Suraci there is an urgent need for a substantial transformation in the fashion industry to address the imminent climate change crisis. It meticulously examines economic factors hindering sustainability, emphasizing the industry's focus on profitability and resistance to change without legal mandates. The holistic approach extends beyond environmental concerns to human rights issues, showcasing a nuanced understanding of intricate challenges. Recognition of potential economic hurdles during the shift to sustainability reflects realism. Emphasis on accountability, responsible practices, and proposed measures, such as prohibiting unsustainable processes and incentivizing sustainability, offers a practical roadmap for positive change. In summary, the article provides a thorough exploration, emphasizing the imperative for transformative practices in the fashion industry amid critical environmental and social considerations (Suraci 2021).

### **Thrift shopping as sustainable fashion**

Thrift shopping, or the practice of buying second-hand clothing and accessories, has gained significant attention in recent years as a sustainable and affordable alternative to traditional fast fashion. Scholars have explored various aspects of thrift fashion, including its environmental impact, social implications, and the changing consumer attitudes toward pre-owned garments. Thrift fashion also has social implications and economic dimensions. The rise of thrift culture is connected to a growing awareness of ethical consumerism. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the exploitative practices associated with fast fashion, and thrift shopping allows them to align their values with their purchasing behavior (Gregory and Das 2020). Furthermore, thrift fashion can empower local economies, as the money spent on second-hand goods often stays within the community (Smith 2018). This study aims to investigate the thrift shopping behaviors of young individuals in Assam, with a particular emphasis on analyzing the motivating factors. The primary focus is on social media, specifically Instagram, as the authors seek to understand the role it plays in influencing and shaping the thrift shopping practices of the youth in the region.

### **Social media's impact on sustainable fashion**

Danielle Sponder Testa and her colleagues studied the role of Instagram in engaging consumers with sustainable fashion, the study contributes to the understanding of how Instagram serves as a tool for promoting sustainable practices within the fashion industry. It encourages further exploration of the subject and stimulates thought on the potential of digital platforms in driving positive change in consumer behavior (Testa et al. 2021).

In the context of digital marketing, a study by Mahmud Akhter Shareef and his colleagues exploring Facebook advertising and how it affects customer perceptions is relevant. It is a useful addition to the discipline because of its in-depth analysis of Facebook advertising and investigation of persuasive components (Shareef et al. 2018). The authors of this study also want to look at how Instagram shapes customer behaviour in relation to thrift stores. The study done by Carolyn McKeown and Linda Shearer adds to the body of knowledge on sustainable fashion. It offers a thorough grasp of the factors influencing sustainability in the fashion industry by focusing on the transformative potential of social media and the impact of institutional celebrity entrepreneurs (McKeown and Shearer 2019).

Social media plays a pivotal role in raising awareness about sustainable fashion practices, including thrift shopping. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become powerful tools for disseminating information on the environmental and ethical benefits of thrift shopping. The visually-driven nature of these platforms allows for the sharing of personal thrift finds and promotes the idea that second-hand clothing can be both stylish and eco-friendly (Brown and Miller 2019).

The emergence of influencers and fashion bloggers dedicated to sustainable fashion has further propelled the thrift shopping movement. The influencers using social media as a platform for showcasing thrifted outfits contribute to changing perceptions around second-hand clothing. By presenting thrifted items in a curated and aesthetically pleasing manner, influencers challenge the stigma associated with pre-owned garments, encouraging their followers to consider thrift shopping as a viable and fashionable choice (Campbell 2020).

A study in Malaysia by Nornajihah Hasbullah and her colleagues explores effective digital communication strategies for sustainable fashion start-ups, using the Personal Knowledge Management (PKM) framework. It incorporates para social relationships and source credibility as influential factors to boost consumer confidence in adopting sustainable fashion. Despite a limited presence in Malaysia, there's evidence of a positive shift towards sustainable fashion. The study suggests that employing PKM, along with para social relationships and source credibility, can successfully promote sustainable fashion through digital platforms, especially on social networking sites (SNS). Social influencers and celebrities in Malaysia play a vital role in driving the sustainable fashion movement, and the study recommends establishing dedicated platforms for consumer participation to maintain momentum. Collaboration among stakeholders is deemed crucial for the future success of sustainable fashion (Hasbullah et al. 2020).

A study by Zheng Shen offers a dual contribution to sustainable fashion marketing literature. Firstly, it addresses inconsistencies in previous research on the effectiveness of communication between sustainable fashion marketing and consumer behaviors. Using text mining and ANOVA, the study challenges established beliefs by revealing that brand names and product categories have minimal impact on consumer behaviors, contrary to prior assumptions. It emphasizes the positive influence of sustainable-related texts, particularly in social media interactions like liking and commenting behaviors. Secondly, the study delves into the relationship between messaging dimensions and consumer behaviors, specifically examining brand examples in sustainable fashion marketing, especially in developing countries. It provides actionable insights for marketers to strategically leverage different types of social media texts to positively shape consumer behaviors. The study recommends prioritizing sustainability and price-related texts for effective engagement

while minimizing the focus on brand and product-related content. Overall, it furnishes valuable managerial insights for those involved in sustainable fashion marketing (Shen 2021).

Social media facilitates the formation of online communities centered around sustainable fashion, including thrift shopping. The role of peer influence in promoting thrift shopping behaviors. Online communities share tips on thrift store locations, sustainable fashion events, and DIY projects, creating a sense of belonging and encouraging individuals to adopt thrift shopping as part of their lifestyle (Wang 2017).

Social media has helped to make thrift fashion more mainstream and even desirable. Influencers and celebrities have been seen wearing vintage and thrift clothing items, which has helped to increase the appeal of second-hand fashion. Emma Watson, a popular English actress is a strong supporter of sustainable fashion, has a large global following and is dedicated to dressing entirely ethically at public events in order to raise awareness and alter people's opinions of the sustainable fashion concept. By refusing to accept money in exchange for supporting any of the companies or goods she discusses, she further establishes her reputation and establishes herself as a trustworthy and sincere influencer. One of the key benefits of social media for thrift fashion is its ability to connect buyers and sellers (Audrezet et. al 2020).

Social media sites like Instagram have enabled users to form a community of people interested in thrift store fashion. Members of this community communicate, share, and buy and sell goods. Furthermore, social media has a significant impact on how people view thrift stores as sustainable fashion options. Influencers, groups, and companies may promote thrift shopping through the visual and interactive aspect of these platforms, which encourages a more environmentally friendly and thoughtful way of consuming apparel.

## **Methodology**

This study aims to explore the impact of social media, especially Instagram, on promoting sustainable fashion within the youth of Assam, with a specific focus on thrift fashion. Conducted as a netnographic study, the research is narrowed down to individuals aged 18 to 30. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the investigation employs tools such as focus groups discussions, questionnaires, and interviews. The survey, employing simple random sampling, gathers insights into Assamese youths' perceptions of thrift fashion. Interviews with thrift store owners operating on Instagram and focus group discussions with youths who purchase thrifted products from social networking sites contribute valuable data for analysis.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Uses and gratification theory**

In this study, the 'Uses and Gratification Theory' serves as a relevant framework, focusing on the reasons behind individuals' media choices, the needs they aim to satisfy, and the gratification derived from media use. This theory highlights the active role of consumers in seeking specific content to fulfill their needs and find satisfaction, emphasizing their engagement with media (Katz et. al. 1973, 511). The study adopts this theory to recognize individuals as active participants in media interactions, particularly on social media platforms. Consumers use social media to meet personal needs, and the theory underscores their motivations and self-perceived requirements. The authors apply this framework to comprehend the diverse motivating factors that drive consumers

to purchase sustainable fashion items from stores on social media platforms, recognizing that different individuals may derive varied gratification from the same communication message.

### **Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

The 'Diffusion of Innovation' theory by Everett Rogers explains the spread of new ideas and products in society through a five-stage process (Rogers et al. 2014, 436). In this study, the authors apply this theory to understand how thrift fashion concepts disseminate over time, considering awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Social media, word of mouth, and personal experiences trigger awareness, while interest is influenced by environmental consciousness and affordability. Evaluation involves weighing the pros and cons of thrift stores, and trial entails experimenting with thrift fashion. Adoption occurs when individuals incorporate thrift items into their regular lifestyle. The study employs surveys, interviews, and social media analysis to investigate motivating and demotivating factors at various diffusion stages.

### **Objective of the Research**

- To study how the youth in Assam engage with thrift fashion through textual and visual content in Instagram
- To study the impact of Instagram on the establishment of thrift stores and thrift shopping practices in Assam
- To study the shopping habits of youth in Assam with respect to thrift fashion
- To identify the factors that impact the choice to embrace or dismiss thrift fashion among the youth in Assam

### **Findings from the Interviews**

A series of interviews were conducted with the thrift shop owners. The interviews reveal that a majority of thrift store owners in Assam, predominantly students aged 20-30, initiated their businesses during the Covid period, exclusively on Instagram. Motivations for choosing Instagram included its popularity, the allure of features like reels and trends, and the shoutout-for-shoutout (S4S) promotion strategy, facilitating nationwide sales. All interviewees drew inspiration from existing thrift store accounts on Instagram. Reels emerged as the most effective tool, and common strategies included engaging influencers, utilizing hashtags, and leveraging Instagram stories for audience engagement. Direct communication through DMs and comments, along with customer feedback and reselling initiatives, enhanced customer engagement. Challenges such as customer confusion, finding the right audience, and addressing skepticism about online thrift shopping were highlighted. Despite challenges, the interviewees believed social media, especially Instagram, played a pivotal role in promoting sustainable fashion. The study points to a growing trend of thrifting post-COVID within the local community, with successful thrift owners expanding to physical shops. The findings underscore the transformative impact of social media on the thrift fashion industry in Assam, outlining both challenges and opportunities for thrift store owners in navigating the online space and promoting sustainable fashion practices.

### **Findings from the focus group discussions**

The focus group discussion with students aged 18-30 who frequently purchase from thrift stores on Instagram revealed several key findings. Firstly, the benefits of buying thrift or second-hand



clothing, highlighted as budget-friendly and unique, align with the notions of slow fashion and environmental friendliness. The respondents emphasized the affordability and sustainability aspects, noting the opportunity to explore a variety of options. Social media, particularly Instagram, played a significant role in influencing their perception and purchasing behavior towards thrift fashion. Instagram helped them discover thrift accounts, with images and influencer endorsements inspiring purchases. Following thrift stores and sustainable fashion influencers was common, with clarity and transparency being crucial factors. Preferred content included credible information about clothing details, clearance sales, materials, and styling options. The respondents unanimously agreed that thrift stores play a role in promoting sustainable fashion by offering a circular approach to sustainability through reuse. Barriers to buying thrift clothing included hygiene concerns and societal perceptions, with a need to address misconceptions about quality and societal prestige. Suggestions for thrift stores to better engage with customers included utilizing Instagram features like reels, impactful pictures, and educating customers about sustainable fashion. The discussion also touched on individual, government, and business collaboration to promote sustainable fashion, emphasizing the need to shift from fast to slow fashion at the individual level and implement stricter measures to reduce pollution in the fashion industry. Overall, the focus group provided valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and potential solutions related to thrift fashion and sustainability.

### **Findings from the survey**

A survey employing simple random sampling was undertaken targeting individuals in the age group of 18-30 years. A structured questionnaire was distributed to students across four

universities in Assam, yielding a total of 87 responses. Some of the major findings indicate that 62% of the total respondents have shopped at a thrift store either in online and offline mode. The majority of the respondents (60.9%) have encountered the term “thrift fashion” through social media, majorly on Instagram. The majority of the respondents (62.1%) favored Instagram for thrift shopping on the social media platforms. Out of all the respondents 79.3% said that they choose thrift shopping because it’s affordable while the second-highest percentage 33.3% mentioned environmental sustainability as their motivation. A large percentage of all respondents (74.7%) acknowledged observing shifts in the popularity of thrift fashion in recent years in Assam. Based on the survey findings, respondents attribute the increasing mainstream status of thrift fashion of factors as new media, cost-effectiveness, and environmental awareness. It is also found that almost 57% of all the respondents followed influencers promoting thrift fashion.

## **Conclusion**

Instagram significantly contributes to the promotion of thrift fashion among the young individuals in Assam. The platform plays a crucial role in comprehending how textual and visual information communicates thrift fashion to consumers, especially through elements like Reels, customer reviews, high-quality product images, comments, influencer endorsements, texts, captions, and hashtags. These components serve as visual and textual cues that attract youth to engage in thrift fashion purchases. The credibility and transparency of thrift accounts are discerned through the presented textual and visual information. Social media, with Instagram at the forefront, emerges as a key influencer in connecting and reshaping consumer behavior toward sustainable fashion. Given Instagram's popularity among youth, who extensively engage with the platform, elements

like Reels efficiently reach a broad audience. The study's participants, predominantly from Assam, provide authentic insights into the influence of thrift fashion, as they showcase awareness and purchasing experiences related to thrift stores. The primary motivation for thrift shopping is affordability, with environmental concerns ranking as the second most influential factor. The study underscores the substantial impact of social media, particularly Instagram, in promoting and influencing sustainable fashion practices, with individuals often inspired to start their thrift stores based on content encountered on the platform.

The study also suggests that the challenges in purchasing thrift clothing stem from worries about cleanliness and societal judgments, requiring a shift in perception regarding quality and social status. To enhance customer engagement, thrift stores can leverage Instagram tools such as reels, striking visuals, and educate about sustainable fashion. While thrift shopping has been gaining traction in Assam, there hasn't been significant progress among the youth compared to the studies cited in the paper. There's a necessity to raise more awareness about its environmental benefits and affordability, and to overcome societal stigma associated with used garments.

### **Employing the theoretical frameworks**

The Uses and Gratification theory suggests that individuals actively choose media to fulfill specific needs. In the realm of social media, study respondents mainly engage in information-seeking, particularly on platforms like Instagram, to stay updated on events, trends, and specific interests like sustainable fashion.

The Diffusion of Innovation theory is essential for comprehending how new ideas gain acceptance in society, even on social media platforms. This theory is highly practical for the strategic

introduction of novel concepts on platforms such as Instagram. Targeting diverse user segments and employing effective communication channels, including reels, customer reviews, quality images, comments, influencer endorsements, texts, captions, and hashtags, allows the platform to optimize the adoption process and enhance overall user engagement.

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## Constituent Assembly Debates on Reservation Policy: Revisiting Framers' Vision for Social Justice in India

Manas Ghose and Paramita Dey

### Abstract

*This paper revisits the Constituent Assembly's debates on reservation policy by highlighting the constitution makers' visions, ambitions, and quest for social justice in India. The framers recognised the inequalities and injustices that certain groups and communities had suffered for a long time. Factors like caste, gender, and geographical segregation were considered as the primary sources of such disadvantages. The central matter of their discussions was primarily about rectifying these disparities by providing socio-political safeguards within the democratic framework of the nation. Thus, to make an inclusive society, ensuring justice for all became the sole objective of the assembly. Drawing ideas from various constitutions around the world, they proposed their own style of constitution, suiting the political environment of that era. By scrutinising diverse political philosophies and concepts like liberty, equality, justice, and fraternity, the framers articulated and adopted affirmative action policies balancing individual and group rights. The debates concerning reservations within the Constituent Assembly show a spectrum of viewpoints. The debates associated with preferential treatment were split into two vertical viewpoints, where one camp proposed a universal set of rights for all its citizens, which was justified in the name of equality of rights and nation-building. Another view championed the idea of promoting group rights by justifying their socio-cultural disparities, which are a result of long-term socio-political power structures both within the majority and minority communities. This paper is intended to investigate the key arguments and compromises that took place during the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD). Furthermore, this paper intends to discover the complex interplay among the historical context, democratic ideals, and pragmatic considerations that gave directions to the newly independent India in the post-colonial period.*

**Key Words:** Constituent Assembly Debates, Reservation, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Social Justice, Social Inclusion

## Introduction

The impact of social exclusion can be felt on both individual and collective levels. While individuals experience it on a personal level, groups or communities experience it on a collective level. With the implementation of the welfare state, group identities were utilised to regulate the roles and responsibilities of the subgroups, along with monitoring the redistribution of resources. The Indian experiences in this regard are very worth mentioning. Group identity greatly influences the distribution of resources available within. After independence, the primary concern for constitution-makers was to define which groups were socially excluded and would receive preferential treatment under the scheme of social redistribution (Ambagudia, 2011, 33). In India, the understanding of liberty is more complex than in Britain because, here, group rights and individual rights are pitted against each other, and these issues have to be understood within a very complicated social environment that combines all sorts of identities with religion, culture, and socio-economic differences. The attempts to overcome the exclusion of some groups took place during British rule. For example, quotas were added to the 'Government of India Act of 1935', and separate electorates were granted to several minority groups to ensure representation inside the legislative bodies. After independence, however, these separate electorates were abolished. The Constitution wanted to ensure a secular state where any religion wouldn't be considered a factor in giving preferential treatment. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a prominent leader from such excluded communities, utters for the excluded communities and demands quotas for the weakest castes and tribes. This promise was met, and the reservation was granted under articles 330 and 331 of the Indian Constitution (Hewitt and Rai, Parliament 33).

The affirmative action policy, or reservation policy in the case of India, is a highly debatable concept. It has been a major issue of political discussion across the world. It can be understood as an established policy for identifying social inequalities, exploitation, and marginalisation that certain communities have faced over time. Such policies are designed to achieve some predefined goals. Firstly, to eliminate the societal and religious restrictions that certain communities have faced due to social exclusion or religious isolation. Here, we can refer to the ex-untouchable community members and the tribal people who face cultural isolation. They are now recognised as Scheduled Castes (SC) as well as Scheduled Tribes (ST). The necessary safeguards are provided to them. Secondly, to promote equal participation for all members of the marginalised groups. Additionally, this framework of reservation also included certain groups officially known as Other Backward Classes (OBC). They are also the victims of the power structure of society. The members of this category belong to the agrarian and artisan communities of that time. Thirdly, to ensure



protection through legislative measures and executive directives for all these groups that are very vulnerable and prone to social exploitation and injustices. In the Constituent Assembly, the makers of our constitution reputedly expressed such objectives throughout their deliberations in the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD) to build a political community based on the principle of social equality and justice (Sheth 2017, 239–240).

The objective of giving reservations to the SCs and STs, which have been in existence for nearly 70 years, was to remove discrimination against them as they were historically left crippled and abandoned. The masses believed that they would find social mobility with access to positions of power. It was social backwardness, not religious identity that the original justification of reservations sought to address. The first task was to identify who was backward. But in doing so, backward castes were included in the list, and the very definition was enlarged, which also resulted in anger among untouchables, considering this a deliberate attempt to mix some other groups who were in more comfortable positions. According to H.N. Kunzru, *'Protection can be granted only to a class, whether you call it minority or backward, only on the ground that it is backward and, if left to itself, would be unable to protect its interests.'* Though often used by members, the term 'backwards' was never defined and was not discussed during the 'Sub-committee on Minority Rights' deliberations. In doing this task, three viewpoints had to be reconciled by the Constitution makers: firstly, everyone should have equal opportunities; secondly, there shouldn't be any reservations; and third, provisions for the representation of specific populations that have not yet been included in the administration must be made (Hasan 2011, 10).

### **Individual Vs. Group Rights: What framers argued in the Constituent Assembly?**

The framers of the Constitution were ahead of their time in political philosophy, and thus they successfully conceptualised a differentiated notion of citizenship. The idea of the formation of a national community, characterised by the notion of a common citizenship framework along with democratic principles, aimed to represent the pan-Indian identity of citizenship. The common citizenship framework tried to bind the citizens to the notion of 'pan-Indian national identity'. In post-colonial India, the rights of the minority raised a crucial question about the 'group-differentiated conception of citizenship'. This question was crucial to the transfer of power during India's independence and remained a central point of contention and debate in the Constituent Assembly (Bader, 2016, 75). A vertical split between two distinct perspectives

can be seen in the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD) regarding the constitution makers' standpoint on rights. The first perspective advocated for a uniform set of rights that would be provided to all its citizens. The supporters of this view justified their stands in the name of equality in attaining rights and equality in treatment, along with building a singular national identity. This approach upheld the view that citizenship should remain unmarked except for commonly shared rights and responsibilities. They advocated for a unified national identity and urged people not to be marked and burdened by any particular distinctions. During the discussion on the Fifth Schedule concerning the autonomy granted to tribal areas, Babu Ramnarayan Singh argued:

*'What is our aspiration for the future? Our aspiration is this. Unfortunately, this country has been divided into so many classes and communities. We should proceed in such a way that all the different communities may vanish and we may have one nation, the Indian Nation. If we proceed with this area and that, we shall fail in the future.'* (Rodrigues 2005, 228).

Several leaders pursued the same thought and agreed with the stand advocated by Babu Ramnarayan Singh. Rohini Kumar Chaudhary, a representative from Assam, proposed his view about the proposal for initiative measures of autonomy for tribal districts under the VI Schedule. Rohini Kumar Choudhary argued:

*'This autonomous district is a weapon whereby steps are taken to keep the tribal people perpetually away from the non-tribals. During the British days, we were not allowed to introduce our culture among those people. Even after the British have gone, we find the same conditions in the New Constitution of Dr Ambedkar.'* (Rodrigues 2005, 228).

It would be fascinating to mention that representatives from minority communities, even minority representatives, advocated the Universalist notion of citizenship. They were expected to propose their voice regarding the safeguards to protect their identity as well as their unique traditions and culture. However, in contrast to the pre-imagined expectations expected from representatives from minority communities, members including R.K. Sidhwa (from the Parsi community) and Dr H.C. Mookherjee (from the Indian Christian community), argued for and upheld the Universalist notion of citizenship. They favoured an impartial system of rights as well as liberties. H.C. Mookherjee argued:

*'I am not one of those who believe that the greatness of a country is increased by increasing the greatness or the economic or political importance of a particular group which is inside it. On the other hand, I have always advocated the placing of national interests above group interests.'* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. V, August 27 1947).

Another approach associated with the rights of the citizen was recognising distinct group identities. According to this approach, India is a multifaceted nation that encompasses diverse identities. If the nation fails to recognise this and does not take any measures to protect its distinct interests, it may result in the reinforcement of majority dominance despite upholding principles like the right to equality and equal treatment of all citizens. Sardar Hukum Singh is one of those who advocated this notion of rights. He strongly advocated for the preservation of minorities in public employment within the purview of Article 296 of the draft constitution of India. He opined that without such measures, *'the aggressiveness of the majority would pass off as nationalism, while the helplessness of the minority might be dubbed as communalism.'* (Rodrigues and Valerian 2005, 229).

However, a significant number of representatives advocated, argued, and agreed in favour of the 'substantive notion of quality'. They justified their views, arguing that it is very important to recognise, acknowledge, and protect diverse identities. This will not only complement ideals like the right to equality and equal treatment but also minimise the chance of excessive majority dominance. The proponent of this viewpoint contends that formal equality in India's socio-economic landscape, which includes inequalities carried over from its colonial past, cannot be reconciled with the framework's purportedly inclusive nature, which is exclusive and driven by the traditional Universalist notion of citizenship. These disparities did not only exist between other religious groups but also within the Hindu community. Pocker Sahib Bahadur, a member of the Muslim community supported this perspective. He suggested protecting minorities through the acknowledgement of cultural communities as well as considering their specific needs (Bader 2016, 79-80).

### **Framer's Views on Reservation Policy: What arguments did they present?**

When India gained its independence from its two hundred years of colonial dominance, ensuring the political representation of minorities was crucial and debatable simultaneously. The assembly felt that the divisions within Indian society could lead to the permanent exclusion of certain groups and communities from political power. The Scheduled Castes (SC) who experienced untouchability aspired for political protection and preferences (Jensenius 2013, 1). To ensure minorities' rights, 'the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities' (Advisory Committee) was created. This committee created a sub-committee on minorities, which was assigned the responsibility of providing recommendations regarding minority representation (Ansari 1999, 116). Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for SCs to ensure their political rights. However, this demand was rejected. Later, he proposed a provision ensuring at least

35 per cent of SCs in reserved constituencies. However, Ambedkar's suggestions were not well received. Lastly, the Advisory Committee dismissed the demand for separate electorates. However, it suggested reservations in seats for both SCs and religious minorities. (Jensenius 2013, 29). On August 27, 1947, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel submitted the Advisory Committee's report to the Constituent Assembly. During his deliberation, he expressed his strong opposition to the system of communal representation. Patel believed such a system would intensify societal division rather than promote unity and integration, which were crucial for the newly independent India. This outlook greatly sharpened the constitutional provisions aimed at fostering a secular and unified nation-state. (Jensenius 2013, 29–30). Sardar Patel argued: *'The introduction of the system of communal electorates is a poison which has entered into the body politic of our country.'* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. V, August 27 1947, 225). Following the report's introduction, there was a discussion on the reservation and separate electorate. A large number of assembly members were adamantly opposed to representation based on group membership. (Jensenius 2013, 30). Some assembly members brought up previous agreements to justify the reserved seats. Jerome D'Souza argued:

*'....There is an impression that reservation is anti-democratic and that it should: somehow be got rid of in the course of the next ten or fewer years. I beg to say that I do not agree with this. Reservation in itself is one way of securing a satisfactory working of the electoral principle..... Nevertheless, I believe that his principle of reservation with general electorates is a bold experiment though fraught with some risks, nonetheless worth making at this juncture for the satisfaction of all..... It cannot be given up, because, if I may venture to remind the majority party in this House, for years together the Congress party has been associated with the demand that there shall be joint electorates with reservation. At this stage to give up reservation as some of my friends wish to do would be in contradiction to the promises held out.....'* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 2014, Vol. V, 27th August 1947, 231).

In the same tone, Madras-based SC delegate Muniswami Pillai reminded everyone of the Poona Pact and the commitment to guarantee SC reserved seats in addition to joint electorates (Jensenius 2013, 30). He contended:

*'It was that Poona Pact, to which you yourself have been a signatory along with me and Dr. Ambedkar that produced a great awakening in this country. Then, sir, one question was in the minds of everybody: whether the Poona Pact will show signs of a change of heart by caste Hindus in this country. Today I may assure you, sir, that that change has come, though not fully 100 per cent, at least more than 50 per cent. I may give you instances here. The very inclusion of Dr Ambedkar in the present Dominion Cabinet is a*

*change of heart of the caste Hindus that the Harijans are not any more to be neglected.*’ (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. V, August 27 1947).

However, sentiments towards minority concessions changed inside the Constituent Assembly as the facts of the India-Pakistan partition became clearer. The Advisory Committee voted to keep reserves for SCs for ten more years, but by May 1949, these would no longer be available for religious minorities. Sardar Patel explained to the President why he changed his mind. He wrote to the President: *‘Some members of the Committee felt that conditions having vastly changed since the Advisory Committee made their recommendations in 1947, it was no longer appropriate in the context of free India and of present conditions that there should be reservation of seats for Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or any other religious minority. Although the abolition of separate electorates had removed much of the poison from the body politic, the reservation of seats for religious communities, it was felt, did lead to a certain degree of separatism and was to that extent contrary to the conception of secular democratic State’* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 2014, Vol. III, 29th April 1947, 421).

The Muslim delegates had diverse views about the concept of reserved seats, but the majority of members were in favour of eliminating the reservations for religious minorities. Begam Aizaz Rasul, a Muslim lawmaker, was one of the most outspoken proponents of eliminating these reservations. She insisted that:

*‘To my mind reservation is a self-destructive weapon which separates the minorities from the majority for all time. It gives no chance to the minorities to win the goodwill of the majority. It keeps up the spirit of separatism and communalism alive which should be done away once and for all.’* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. VIII, May 25, 1949, 300). Tajamul Husein argued:

*“The term ‘minority’ is a British creation. The British created minorities. The British have gone and minorities have gone with them. Remove the term ‘minority’ from your dictionary. There is no minority in India. Only so long as there were separate electorates and reservation of seats there was a majority community and a minority community.”* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. VIII, May 26, 1949, 333).

Finally, a decision was made to keep the SC provisions in place despite the elimination of the religious group quotas. Mahavir Tyagi advocated that representational guarantees should be based on class rather than caste. He argued:

*“.....You will see, Sir, that when the idea of giving separate reservations to the scheduled castes was first introduced, the intention was that it should last only for twenty years. After that period they were expected*

*to become absolutely one with the Hindus. It was in the year 1933 and now it is 1949. So it is only a few years less than twenty..... The term 'Scheduled Castes' is a fiction. Factually there is no such thing as 'Scheduled Castes'. There are some castes who are depressed, some castes who are poor, some who are untouchables, some who are downtrodden. All their names were collected from the various provinces and put into one category 'Scheduled Castes'..... By allowing caste representations, let us not re-inject the poisonous virus which the Britisher has introduced into our body politic. I would suggest Sir, that instead of the so-called Scheduled Caste, minorities be protected, if you like, on class basis" (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. VIII, May 26, 1949, 334).*

Although the Constituent Assembly's majority members approved the idea, many other members were opposed to giving SCs quotas. According to Shri L. S. Bhatkar, *'I have no hesitation in saying that if we had removed even this provision from the Constitution, it would have been for the better. But because the Scheduled Castes are poor, uneducated and suffer because of their status in society and because of the prevailing social customs, it would have been unjust not to provide for them some special facility in the Constitution. It has been done because they are not capable of uplifting themselves. I hope that during the coming ten years the Scheduled Castes would be able to make progress with the co-operation of every one amongst us and then it would be unnecessary to continue the special facilities we have granted them today'* (constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol. III, May 26, 2014, 201). The architect of modern India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated,

*'Frankly, I would like this proposal to go further and put an end to such reservations as there still remain. But again, speaking frankly, I realise that in the present state of affairs in India that would not be a desirable thing to do that is to say, in regard to the Scheduled Castes. I try to look upon the problem not in the sense of a religious minority but rather in the sense of helping backward groups in the country. I do not look at it from the religious point of view or the caste point of view, but from the point of view that a backward group ought to be helped, and I am glad that this reservation also will be limited to ten years.'* (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1999, Vol III, May 26, 1949, 331).

Sardar Patel introduced a draft report of the 'Advisory Committee on Minorities'. He delivered, *'We have divided the minorities according to their strength or according to their population. In the Schedule, the three parts are set out and dealt with separately because they require separate consideration in proportion to their strength'* (Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume IX, 1947). Less than 0.5 per cent of the population belongs to Group A, which is made up of Anglo-Indians, Parsees, and Assam's Plains tribesmen. The population of Group B, which comprised Sikhs and Indian Christians, did not exceed 1.5 per cent.

Group C comprises Muslims and Scheduled Castes, with a population that surpasses 1.5 per cent. The representation was allowed based on population size. The Anglo-Indian community did not receive any reservations as they had a very small population. Similarly, the Parsees, although considered a minority community, did not claim reservation in the legislature. Therefore, they too did not get reservation opportunities. However, in Bombay and Madras provinces, the Indian Christians were given reservations for seats in both the central and provincial legislatures. Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Muslims, who are the socio-religious minorities of India, achieved reservation based on their population. Considering various recommendations from different committees, a system of proportional representation that is similar to what was given to Assam's tribes was expanded to all the tribal groups of India (Bader 2016, 86-87). On May 26, 1949, the Constituent Assembly approved the Advisory Committee's recommendations, which included granting reserved seats with joint electorates for SCs. Although many members were opposed to this measure, they viewed it as a means to help SC community members become more competitive in elections. The original plan for the reservation system was to give SC candidates ten years to completely assimilate into the political system. After Partition, in the altered political climate, the draft constitution excluded reserved seats for religious groups. However, the assembly retained reserved seats for SC and ST, as these quotas were seen as essential for supporting a disadvantaged and marginalized segment of society who faced historical injustices. (Jensenius 2013, 35).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Constituent Assembly Debate (CAD) over the reservation policy stands as a seminal moment in India's journey towards social justice and equity. Through a detailed analysis of the framers' arguments, it becomes very clear that the visions, aims, and strategies behind the drafting of the new Indian Constitution were deeply committed to addressing historical injustices and fostering equality in every section of society through a democratic framework. The debates within the Constituent Assembly reflected a rich discussion about perspectives, ideologies, and interests, underscoring the complexities inherent in formulating policies aimed at rectifying historical injustices and disparities. While some advocated for robust affirmative action measures as essential tools for safeguarding the marginalised, others suggested a Universalistic notion of citizenship, irrespective of differences. Despite these divergent viewpoints, the framers ultimately forged a compromise that laid the foundation for India's reservation policies. Their vision extended beyond mere redresses of past grievances; it aspired towards societal transformation, seeking to dismantle structural barriers hindering the full realisation of citizenship rights for all. Revisiting the

Constituent Assembly debates on reservation policy holds profound relevance in contemporary India. It offers invaluable insights into the origins, intentions, and complexities of reservation policies, informing ongoing discussions and debates on social justice and equity.

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## **Assessing the living conditions of people in informal settlements in urban areas: The case of Harare, Zimbabwe**

**Memory Chinoda**

### **Abstract**

*Urban squatters represent a significant demographic in many developing cities worldwide, including Harare and Zimbabwe. Despite their prevalence, the living conditions and socioeconomic challenges faced by squatter communities often need to be studied more. This research aims to fill this gap by comprehensively assessing the living conditions of urban squatters in Harare. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observational studies, this study will investigate various aspects such as housing conditions, access to essential services, socioeconomic status, and community dynamics within squatter settlements. The findings will help policymakers, urban planners, and NGOs develop targeted interventions to enhance the quality of life and livelihoods of marginalized populations, highlighting the need for further research on urban squatters' experiences in developing cities.*

Keywords: Urbanisation; Informal settlements; Land tenure; Land reform

### **Introduction**

The issue of urbanisation is widespread (UN Habitat. 2002). Thus, urban living will become increasingly prevalent in the twenty-first century, unlike anything we have ever experienced (Winstanley, Thorns and Perkins 2002). Currently, an estimate of over half of the world's population is said to be found in cities. This movement of people to the cities has been predicted to continue throughout the twenty-first century, with developing nations experiencing the fastest population growth rates, (Cities 2021). According to (UN Habitat. 2002) it postulates that between 2007 and 2025 the majority of the population would increase in developing countries which is anticipated to be 2.27%, whereas in the wealthy it is only 0.49%. Based on this notable expansion and urbanisation, cities in underdeveloped nations are urbanising more quickly than cities in developed nations.

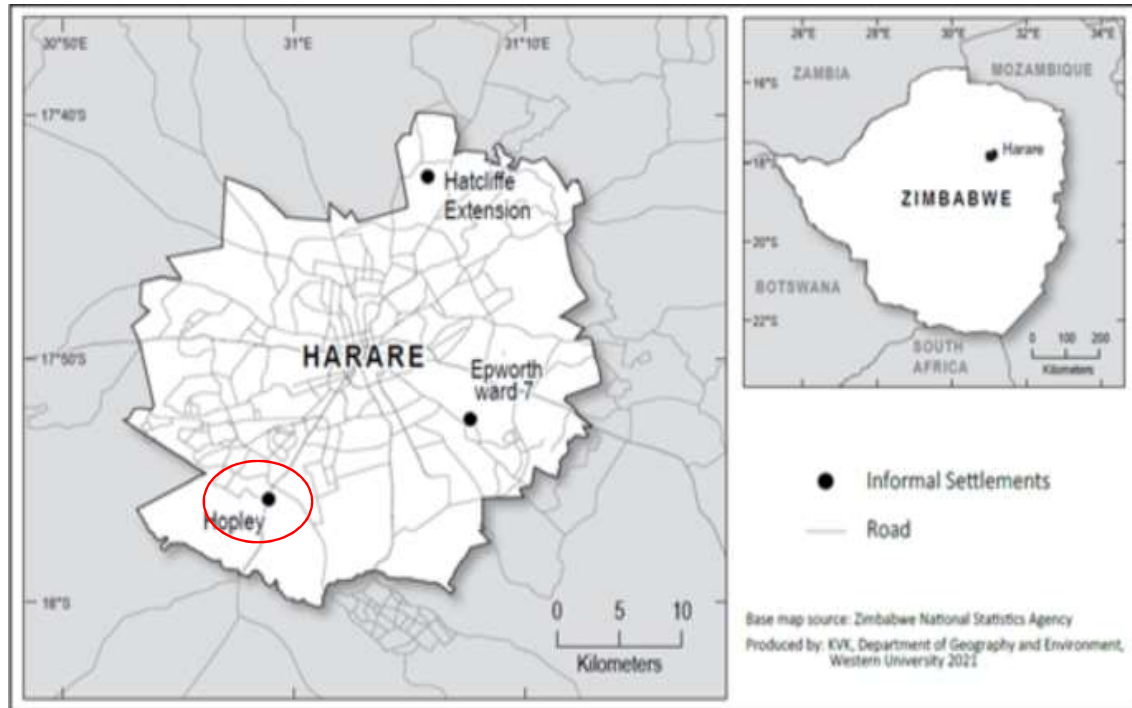
(Cheema 1993), (Cohen 2006) emphasizes the potential for social and economic progress while also underlining the complexity of managing growing cities and the role that inappropriate policy responses and unchecked expansion play in contributing to urban issues. Thus, despite the economic and social benefits, fast urbanization and unrestrained urban area growth—particularly in developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America—have led to several negative repercussions. Another cause of the rapid rate of urbanization is the creation of residential zones for housing. Squatter communities and shanty towns are proliferating quickly in metropolitan regions across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which is causing concerns about the detrimental social, economic, and political effects of urbanization (Beall and Fox 2009). Nonetheless, Hopley's peri-urban settlement is the main subject of this investigation.

Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, was founded in 1890 by British colonists. Originally intended to house 300,000 people, Harare now has a population of at least 2 million (16.3% of Zimbabwe's total) (City of Harare 2012), (ZimStat 2013). Natural growth occurs at an average annual rate of 2.56% (ZimStat 2013). Like all other cities in Zimbabwe, Harare was marked from before independence by a lack of available housing (Chirisa and Matamanda 2016).

Harare's urbanization accelerated following its independence in 1980. As said (Mtomba 2015), African governments have found it difficult to supply enough housing for the continent's expanding population, resulting in a housing backlog that now exceeds 500,000 units. In high-density residential areas, 93% of Harare's population had illegal outbuildings by 2002, while 10% of the population continued to live in illegal colonies. As of right now, around 20 colonies in Harare are home to over 6000 illegal squatters, according to (Mtomba 2015). These unofficial colonies in Harare comprise expansive villages strewn around the city's edge. Hopley, near Chitungwiza on the outskirts of the city, and White Cliff, along the Harare-Bulawayo Highway, are two examples.

The development of settlements in the city is guided by legislation and planning practices, as demonstrated by the modifications made to the local council housing policy in Harare. In 2012, the Harare Strategic Plan 2012–2025 was approved to change the city's perspective, with one of its main goals being to address challenges related to the informal settlement (City of Harare 2012). One other issue that has been identified as contributing to the rise in informal settlement is corruption, as some planners and council employees have become so corrupt that their work may end up being distributed to those living in unserved lands (Chirisa, Bobo and Matamanda

2016), (Cirolia and Berrisford 2017). As a result, policy ambiguity and inconsistencies prevent Harare from becoming a sustainable city (Mbiba 2017).



*Figure 1: Map of Harare showing the position of Hopley which lies at the fringe of the city*

### Defining Urbanisation

Urbanization, as defined by (Hardoy and Satterthwaite 2015) is the rise in the percentage of the population living in urban regions as a result of social, political, and economic developments. Urbanization is not the same as urban growth, which is the rise in the number of people residing in urban areas. The percentage of the population that lives in urban areas is referred to as the "level of urbanization," emphasizing the difference between urbanization and urban expansion.

### Rapid urbanisation- a worldwide overview

Nowadays, the vast majority of people on the planet reside in cities. This is expected to increase to two-thirds by 2050, mostly due to emerging nations (UNDESA 2014). Up to 90% of the

expected rise in the urban population by 2050 is expected to occur in Asia and Africa. Large nations like China, India, and Nigeria are primarily responsible for the rise in the urban population (UNDESA 2014). Nonetheless, variations in the percentage of the population living in urban regions more accurately represent the dynamics of urbanization.

According to this measurement, the 20 nations that are anticipated to have the biggest increases are all in Asia and Africa; twelve of the twenty are fragile states, and several of them now have low rates of urbanization. It is important to emphasize that a large number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa lack current census data, or if they have, its quality is disputed; as a result, forecasts are questionable (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013).

Urbanisation manifests as the expansion of several kinds of communities. Megacities, or cities with a population of 10 million or more, have drawn much attention since they are relatively recent. 28 "megacities" exist now, compared to just two in 1970; by 2030, 41 are expected. Concerns have been raised about the ability of the local population to handle urban expansion at such a scale because China and India are home to many of the fastest expanding megacities; several of these cities are also situated in today's fragile states, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Egypt.

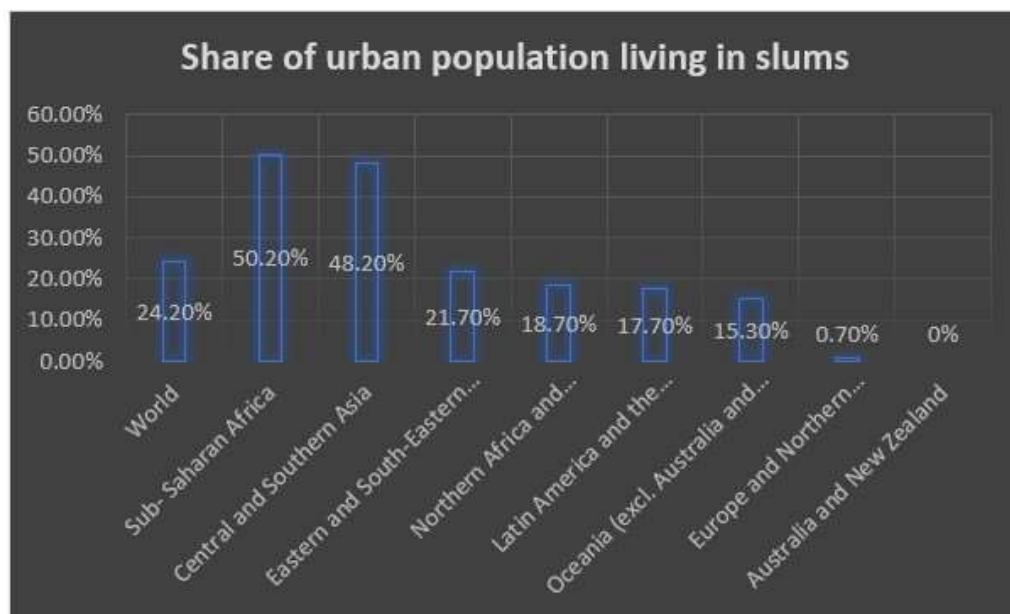
### **The expansion of slum settlements**

Informal settlements typically arise due to bad governance, a shortage of cheap housing, and a fast increase in urban population. In many instances, the urbanisation rate surpasses the ability of governments to furnish the necessary resources (land, utilities, infrastructure) for reasonably priced housing to a growing populace. Furthermore, peri-urban areas—which can exist outside of administrative borders and need to be treated by both urban and rural administrators—are frequently the site of urban expansion. In other situations, governments refuse to take action because they think that helping the impoverished and giving them better conditions will draw more people and make slums expand. This implies that slums expand as long as they go uncared for.

It is difficult to get statistics on slum settlements since, by definition, they are unrecognized and unrecorded. As of 2014, 881 million people were estimated to be living in slums worldwide

by UN-Habitat, which represents slightly less than one-third of all urban inhabitants in developing nations (UN Habitat. 2002).

In 2020, a quarter of all metropolitan people worldwide it resided in slums. Out of all the main areas, Sub-Saharan Africa has the greatest percentage of its people living in slums (50.2%). In contrast, there were no urban slum dwellers in Australia or New Zealand in 2020.



Source: *UN-Habitat (2014)*

Figure 2: *Share of urban population living in slums 2020, by region*

### Urbanisation in Zimbabwe

Urbanization in Zimbabwe dates back to the colonial era. As mentioned, (Munzwa and Wellington 2010), rural villages dominated Zimbabwe before colonization. When colonists arrived in Zimbabwe in 1890, they established administrative centres and institutions and created supported infrastructure, such as urban centres and communication links like roads and railways, according to (Wekwete 1992). People were reorganized by the new governmental system, which forced indigenous people to relocate from their ancestral lands to peripheral

locations. The Land Appointment Act of 1930, the Land Husbandry Act of 1950, and the Land Tenure Act of 1969 are only a few of the measures that made the reorganization effective.

This led to the creation of cities such as Gweru, Harare, Masvingo, Marondera, Bindura, Kwekwe and Chinhoyi, Bulawayo. Since then, there has been a notable expansion in population in most cities. For example, the population of Chinhoyi grew from 8000 in 1961/2 and almost doubled to 77929 in 2012, the trend is the same for other cities.

*Table 1: Population in major cities*

| <b>Population in census years</b> |             |             |             |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>City</b>                       | <b>1982</b> | <b>1992</b> | <b>2002</b> | <b>2012</b> |
| <b>Harare</b>                     | 656 011     | 1 189 103   | 1 435 784   | 1 468 767   |
| <b>Bulawayo</b>                   | 413 814     | 621 742     | 676 650     | 655 675     |
| <b>Mutare</b>                     | 69 521      | 131 367     | 170 466     | 188 2465    |
| <b>Gweru</b>                      | 78918       | 128 037     | 140 806     | 158 233     |
| <b>Masvingo</b>                   | 30 523      | 51 743      | 69 490      | 88 554      |

Source: **(ZIMSTAT 2012)**

### **Urbanisation issues**

Despite the benefits of urbanisation, many issues and challenges in urban areas include:

- Formation of informal settlements, slums, and unplanned urbanisation with contributions to urban poverty
- Problems with water safety, food, congested traffic, and increased crime rate.
- Unhealthy housing
- Environmental problems, like air pollution, water pollution

## History of Informal Settlement

The history of informal settlements dates back centuries, but a significant flow occurred during the rapid urbanisation of the 19th and 20th centuries. These settlements, often referred to as slums, shantytowns, or squatter settlements, emerged as a response to various socioeconomic factors and urbanisation processes.

According to (M. Davis 2006), the industrial revolution and rural-to-urban migration it has led to an influx of people into cities, creating a demand for affordable housing that formal urban planning failed to meet. This resulted in the spontaneous formation of informal settlements on the outskirts of urban areas.

During the mid-20th century, globalisation and economic imbalance further contributed to the expansion of informal settlements. According to (Gilbert 1992), the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities forced marginalised populations to seek shelter in temporary communities, often without proper infrastructure or legal recognition. In many cases, government policies and urban planning strategies worsen the growth of informal settlements. (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013) argue that inadequate land-use planning, restrictive housing policies, and authorities' neglect contributed to the expansion of these settlements.

Political factors have also influenced informal settlements. In regions with political instability and conflict, displaced populations often form informal settlements to survive. According to (UN Habitat. 2002), long-lasting conflicts in various parts of the world have displaced millions, creating informal settlements.

### Informal Settlements

"Most new housing and most new neighbourhoods in Third World cities are organised, planned and built outside the law" (Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1989)

Informal settlements are a common occurrence in most Third World cities. The fact that these settlements are widespread is underwritten by the variety of names by which they are known in various parts of the world: *gecekondu* in Turkey (meaning built overnight), *villa misera* in Buenos Aires (translates into misery settlement), *favelas* in Brazil, *ranchos* in Venezuela, *musseques* in Angola, *bustees* in Calcutta (India), *bidonvilles* in Algeria,



*colonias proletarias* in Mexico, *pueblos jóvenes* (young towns) in Peru, *barong-barong* in the Philippines. Name or no name, informal settlements prevail in Third World cities.

## Historical Background

### a. The Colonial Legacy

(Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1989) found out that the Third World reveals that many cities were founded or transformed by colonialists, leading to a divide between Europeans and natives. Europeans were confined to well-equipped precincts with infrastructure, while natives were restricted to less well-served areas. This division was often marked by a *cordon sanitaire*, separating the native city from the European city. After independence, this segregation persisted based on income levels, with the new ruling class and their cronies taking over the well-designed precincts. The marginalized poor built informal cities, often illegal due to their inability to afford planning standards, resulting in the development of the city of the rich and the city of the poor.

### b. The Development of Tenements

Tenements, the earliest form of illegal housing, were prevalent in Latin American cities like Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro, and, were built between 1880-1910. They were often converted from existing buildings for middle- or upper-income groups who moved to suburbs. Tenements were also built for poor people. Examples of tenements can be found in Asia, particularly in cities like Colombo, Mumbai, and New Delhi. Tenement districts in Nigeria were constructed between 1910 and 1930.

(Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1989) vividly describe the extremes to which subdivision in tenements can go: "In slum area cities in South and Southeast Asia, the process of subdivision has reached a point where small windowless cubicles are being let to poor urban dwellers. Such subdivisions can be five square meters or even less. The 'hotbed' system in Calcutta represents the extremes of tenement housing; here, beds are rented by the hour, with two or three persons using the same bed over 24 hours. As many beds as possible are crammed into each room, stacked as bunks, one above another."

## **Reasons for Large-Scale Occurrence of Informal Settlements**

The primary reasons for the widespread occurrence of informal settlements are several:

- Partisan influence in planning; strict laws, rules, and standards
- lack of accountability in planning affairs
- bribery and corruption
- fragmented planning systems (overlapping legislation)
- economic hardships
- failure to plan, being overtaken by events

## **Study Area**

### **Description of the area under study**

#### **The peri-urban Settlement of Hopley**

In 2005, the Zimbabwean Government established the Hopley Settlement to eradicate slums and unlawful structures in urban areas (ZESN 2008), (Nhapi 2009). The inhabitants of Hopley Farm were uprooted from several places, including Hatcliffe Extension, Porta Farm, and Mbare.

Around 15,000 people are living in Hopley Settlement, which is situated south of Harare's Central Business District (ZIMSTAT 2012). The research area is approximately  $4\text{km}^2$ . In Hopley Settlement, each dwelling unit has about  $250\text{ m}^2$  area. South View Park residential neighbourhood, Irvin's Chickens Poultry Farm, Derbyshire Farm, Boka Tobacco Sales Floor, Stoneridge Residential, Granville "Mbudzi" Cemetery, and Waterfalls Residential all encircle Hopley Settlement.

The majority of the farmlands that host these communities are still not part of the City of Harare. As a result, they need to be better equipped to handle urban (Chirisa, Gaza and Banduko 2014). Most of the housing in Hopley Settlement is in the form of shacks, which are either built of plastic or hastily erected using "green" bricks, and are either temporary or semi-permanent (Nyama 2013). A significant percentage of these buildings were constructed at the time by the Ministry of Local Government and Urban Development, while a small number of dwellings were constructed using approved plans.

## Land Use

Pit latrines are the sanitation system used in Hopley Settlement to eliminate human waste. Hopley Settlement's open areas are being used for the careless disposal of waste due to inadequate waste management by the City of Harare.



*Figure 3: Wastewater flowing in the streets from a “septic tank” (left), Dumping of refuse onto open spaces in Hopley Settlement (right),*

## Housing

Hopley houses are mostly temporary or semi-permanent shacks, ranging from plastic shacks to green brick buildings. Some homes have been erected in Zone One with authorized plans. Most were built during the government's mismanaged restoration effort, “Operation Garikai”. A portion of one-roomed polythene shacks was given to Murambatsvina victims by the International Organisation for Migration as part of an emergency response program.



*Figure 4: Plastic shacks in Hopley*

### **Land Tenure**

(Moyo, Mvumi and Marisa 2017) have highlighted the significant land reforms implemented in Zimbabwe since the early 2000s to address land tenure issues in Hopley, Harare. These reforms aim to correct historical inequities in land ownership and distribute land to formerly oppressed groups, including small-scale farmers and landless residents, through land redistribution projects.

(Moyo, Mvumi and Marisa 2017)'s research highlights the significant shift in land tenure in Zimbabwe since the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP)'s adoption in the early 2000s. (Scoones, et al. 2010) highlight the limited access to land for black Zimbabweans, who were previously primarily held by white commercial farmers. This change has significantly improved land distribution.

(Matondi 2014), highlights the issue of land occupations and informal settlements in Hopley, where individuals or organizations seized land without official permission. These settlements

often lack essential infrastructure, leading to issues with access to clean water, hygienic conditions, and poor housing. Additionally, residents face uncertain tenure security due to the risk of eviction or relocation due to competing land claims or government-led clearing efforts. Land tenure in informal settlements like Hopley is exacerbated by socioeconomic factors like poverty, unemployment, and urbanization, which have pushed available resources and exacerbated issues due to rapid population growth and urban migration.

### **Basic Services**

Essential services in Hopley, Harare, often need to be improved, particularly in informal settlements where residents face numerous challenges in accessing essential amenities. Proper infrastructure and service provision are needed to improve the living conditions of residents in these areas.

#### **1. Water and Sanitation:**

Access to sanitary facilities and clean water is still a significant problem in Hopley. Many locals depend on unsafe water sources like unprotected wells or shared boreholes, which puts them at risk for illnesses, including waterborne infections (**Matondi 2014**). Many homes need functional sewage systems or toilets, contributing to the need for acceptable sanitation services.

#### **2. Healthcare:**

Hopley's population is underserved by healthcare institutions, making access to services scarce. Due to the expense of services and the distance to healthcare facilities, residents frequently encounter difficulties accessing medical treatment, especially in an emergency. Hopley's situation has remained uncertain despite recent investments made to improve the health delivery services in other Harare communities after years of neglect (**Amnesty 2010**) the temporary clinic established in 2005 by a charitable organisation and later transferred to the Harare City Council (HCC) is far from sufficient. It is in an outdated farmhouse with poor sanitary facilities and no running water. There's only one pit toilet shared by patients and clinic workers. The clinic needs a more reliable supply of medications. Crucially, this facility does not offer services for the care of mothers and newborns.

### **3. Education:**

Hopley's schools face inadequate facilities, teaching resources, and poor essential service delivery, exacerbated by poverty and socioeconomic factors. This highlights significant issues with infrastructure development, urban planning, and service delivery in Zimbabwe, particularly among poverty-stricken populations.

### **Economic Activities**

Hopley residents work part-time in nearby suburbs and engage in informal business ventures like selling vegetables and firewood. Sand mining is widespread, selling sand to Harare suburbs. Despite the lack of official job prospects, some locals seek work in manufacturing, retail, or service sectors in neighbouring towns. Barriers like low education, skill mismatch, and high commuting expenses often hinder formal job opportunities.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research design and methods**

The study uses a qualitative exploratory phenomenological research design. The exploratory phenomenological research approach played a crucial role in examining Hopley inhabitants' lived experiences with issues related to urban security. Initially, 450 household heads in Hopley Farm Settlement were given questionnaires as part of a study to gain a general grasp of the needs and concerns of the people. Around 7,000 families were thought to be housed at Hopley Farm Settlement at the time. The in-depth interviews were based on the questionnaire survey since specific respondents revealed difficulties that need more discussion. In this round of the survey, we asked participants for permission to provide more detailed information on Hopley Farm Settlement's essential service accessibility.

The study involved in-depth interviews with Hopley residents and three public sector planning experts to understand the impact of essential infrastructure and services on their lives.

### **Results and discussion**

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that two-thirds of urban populations in developing countries lack adequate sanitation facilities, including flush toilets, latrines, and covered pits. Poor sewage disposal facilities and the use of pit latrines are common issues,

leading to groundwater pollution in small-plot emerging settlements like Hopley. This lack of sanitation is crucial for healthy living and environmental sustainability.

Waste management in Hopley faces challenges due to a lack of municipal services, leading to people throwing waste at convenience. Runoff and high humidity during monsoons increase health hazards, attracting disease vectors like flies, mosquitoes, and cockroaches, and increasing the risk of spreading diseases like cholera, malaria, dysentery, and typhoid.

Slum children in Harare face severe health conditions, including malnutrition and high infant and maternal mortality rates. Unable to access basic healthcare, pregnant women and girls endanger the lives of both themselves and their unborn children. The government's inability to provide proper care worsens this issue.

### **Conclusion and suggestions**

The Hopley settlement suffers from poor living conditions, including inadequate housing, medical facilities, and inadequate waste disposal and sewage systems, leading to pollution and health issues.

### **Following are the suggestions devised to improvise the scenario:**

The study suggests that public-private partnerships can enhance residential living conditions by providing basic amenities, suitable housing, and proper sanitation. Legal actions should be implemented to punish lawbreakers, and regular waste collection should be encouraged.

The government, NGOs, and private sector must be strengthened and augmented to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for marginalized communities in slum areas.

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## Memory Chinoda

Masters in Urban and Regional Planning

# The Multifaceted Dynamics of Fake News in the Era of Post-Truth: Comments and Recommendations

Mohammed Johaed

## Abstract

*In one of her pieces, American digital journalist Alice Minium claims that "we don't need nukes. We have the internet." The phrase requires us to look for ways to refute false information in this post-truth era, where fake news and disinformation have become powerful weapons sharply mimicking the "real" news. Today, fake news is a global phenomenon that threatens the very foundation of human discourse due to internet's easy accessibility. Toolkits like fact checking, news literacy, social media cleansing, etc. are increasingly becoming insufficient to counter this persisting problem. Silvio Waisbord, the author of "Truth is what happens to News" and other noteworthy works, has explored the complexities of fake news and post-truth extensively. However, finding effective solutions remains challenging. As we navigate this landscape, it's crucial to recognize the limitations of our current approaches and consider alternative strategies. While there's no easy way out, the author here attempts to a deeper understanding of the causes and dynamics behind fake news in the light of Waisbord's literary works on fake news, in a hope to open new doors to more effective measures.*

*Keywords: fake news, post truth, digital media, social media, misinformation, disinformation*

## Introduction and Background

There's a common misconception that 'fake news' causes communication breakdowns that affect the societies. Its spread has the potential to sway public opinion, impede democratic processes, and damage reputations. Certain actors use artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technology to spread false information, especially during conflicts and emergency situations. Since the 1890s, lies posing as news have been disseminated under the moniker "fake news" (Kalsnes 2018, 4). Many stirring terms such as, "information pollution," (Wardle et al. 2017, 4) "media manipulation," (Marwick and Lewis 2017, 3-86) and "information warfare" (Khaldarova and Pantti 2018, 2-15) have been applied to fake news academics. Election-related conversations usually have increased mentions of fake news, as seen in the US in 2016 and India's general elections in 2019 (Raj 2023, 366-385). Compared to the US, India's use of digital media in

politics was initially less well-known, but with the rise of social media sites, this has changed (Brummette et al. 2018, 497-517).

Fake news, which misrepresented real news stories and proliferated via social media platforms, became more prevalent during the 2016 US presidential election (Bovet and Makse 2019, 7). Fake news articles on Facebook received more shares, reactions, and comments in the final three months of the campaign than authentic news articles (Tamul et al. 2020, 301-330). According to studies, the average American may come across one to three fake news stories each month during election season (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017, 211-236). Again, with 376.1 million users in India in 2020 (Keelery 2020), Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube being the most popular platforms, the spread of fake news in the country has exploded since 2019. (Al-Zaman 2021, 25-47). Online disinformation is used in India to manipulate politics and religion; it is frequently coordinated by the 'IT Cell' of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party. It is also abused by "*Gau-Rakshaks*" (Cow Vigilantes) to target minority communities, especially Muslims (Chaturvedi 2016, 24; Mukherjee 2020, 79-101).

A rise in fake news has been caused by recent conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel and Hamas, which has increased uncertainty around the world (Mcintyre 2021, 113–124). With so much fake news available online, it's getting harder to tell fact from fiction (Cottle 2006, 6). Information warfare has become more chaotic due to the internet, making it more difficult to create coherent narratives (Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2015, 1320–1338). While fake news in India exacerbates divisions over issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Ukrainian crisis raises concerns about Russia's use of information warfare (Khaldarova and Pantti 2018).

According to Waisbord (2018), fake news is a reflection of the aggressive nature of contemporary news media, heralding the end of established hierarchies and the emergence of "communication chaos" (p. 1866-1878). Truth is no longer linked to reality in this era; instead, it is fragmented and contested, with elites, governments, and mainstream media fighting for control over narratives. According to Waisbord (2018), post-truth denotes a failure to control knowledge using scientific methods, tainting the truth and influencing journalism (p. 1870).

### **Fake News is not New**

But this propagation of fake news is not a new practice. Waisbord (2018) emphasises that the practice of disseminating misleading information under the guise of news is not a recent development, as it has a longer

history than genuine reporting. Safieddine and Ibrahim (2020) divide fake news into seven groups, including content manipulation, satire, and propaganda (p. 1-19).

Burkhardt (2017) delves into the history of fake news, tracing its evolution from the pre-printing press era to the digital age. She highlights instances such as Procopius of Caesarea's use of fake news to smear Emperor Justinian in the sixth century AD and Pietro Aretino's malicious writings in 1522 (p. 5-8). In the mass media era, incidents like Father Ronald Arbuthnott's fake news broadcast on BBC radio in 1926 exemplify the rapid spread and impact of misinformation. Newspapers in the 1700s-1800s also played a role in disseminating politically biased content (Dornan 2017, 7).

Some contend that the origins of fake news can be traced back to the early print media, citing the New York Sun's 1835 fabrication of John Herschel's lunar observations as an example (Stavre and Punti 2019, 214). Fake news has a global impact, particularly in the digital age, as evidenced by the spike in reports following the 2016 US presidential campaign (Affelt 2019, 57-84). With the advent of AI and bots, it is essential to comprehend how fake news is created and disseminated in order to put ethical and legal measures in place. In an era of post-truth politics, where truth is shaped by individual and collective ideologies rather than by scientific consensus, Waisbord draws attention to how recent political events have widened social divides (Waisbord 2018, 1871).

### **Production and Repercussion**

News happens; fake news is manufactured. Popular Youtuber Dhruv Rathee in one of his videos presents a detailed account of how fake news is created, how to identify them and how to verify the validity of the news. Another interesting video on the official YouTube channel of US based 'Wired' with over 10.7 million subscribers, displays how a fake news is actually created and how it works. Excerpts from the video follows.

“At the start of 2016 in a small town called Veles in Macedonia, an 18-year-old high school student discovered that he could make more money than his parents by building fake news sites. To protect his identity, we'll call him Boris. And here's how he did it. He wrote tons of false articles about the U.S. election, most of them salacious. The articles were shared on Facebook, garnering tons of traffic. So much so that Boris' most popular website earned him \$16,000 over the course of a few months... So, Boris dropped out of high school. And he was not alone. In the final weeks of the election, there were more than 100 political

websites registered to Veles. The most popular stories were pro-Trump, but that's not because Boris and his fake news publishers liked the candidate."

This initial part of the video talks about the initiation of fake news, as how sometime peddling fake news is not intentional but circumstantial. But ultimately the goal of such news is always political and/or monetary. The following information explains how social media platform blindly pays these channel operators without caring what information the channel is disseminating.

"They just liked the money. Trump supporters just happened to be more likely to share fake news. Researchers tracked 30 million shares of pro-Trump stories on Facebook in the months before the election. But why were companies advertising on fake news sites? They weren't directly. Those ads were placed by services like Google AdSense or AppNexus, which act as intermediaries between advertisers and small-time publishers like Boris. They negotiate how much ads cost and manage payments from advertisers to publishers. Those ads follow people wherever they go online. Remember when you recently searched for that onesie? Well, that search was tracked and matched with advertisers selling that product. So everywhere you go on the web a onesie advt. follows. Advertisers and these services create blacklists of sites they won't advertise against. But it's hard to keep up. So sometimes they pop up on fake news sites that haven't been discovered yet. While Boris and his friends were making money, fake news became one of the major scandals of the 2016 elections."

A Global Risk Report 2024 by World Economic Forum, based on a survey of 1940 experts finds that India has the highest risk of false information (The Wire 2024; Statista 2024). As evidenced by the tragic case of seven people who were lynched in Jharkhand in 2017 after believing a WhatsApp forward, misinformation spreading in India has resulted in lynchings (Laskar and Reyaz 2021, 93-116). Since 2014, there have been numerous lynchings associated with vigilante violence against dairy cows, including ones in Dadri in 2015 and Alwar in 2017 in India (Biswas 2017; Kanwar 2020, 57-69). These incidents highlight the significant negative effects of fake news on society, which go beyond mere physical harm to undermine social cohesiveness and democratic ideals.

People are susceptible to fake news regardless of their level of education because of psychological biases and a desire for information that confirms their preexisting beliefs (Galletta and Galletta 2022). Studies reveal that people don't always seek factual accuracy when consuming media (Lazer et al. 2018, 1094-1096), and a large percentage of US adults don't verify the accuracy of news stories (Signal Labs, 2017).

Furthermore, even after the falsehood is refuted, people who have been exposed to misinformation might find it difficult to change their minds (Vo and Lee 2018, 275-284).

Fake news is driven by ideology, financial gain, and social acceptance (Baptista and Gradim 2021, 426-443). Both real and fake news sites make money from clicks, views, and shares online (Braun and Eklund 2019, 1-21). False stories spread based on engagement metrics like shares and comments (Tandoc et al. 2018, 137–153). Dhruv Rathee offers a simple way to spot fake news: if a WhatsApp message lacks links or sources, it's probably fake (Rathee 2017). He suggests checking headlines for logic and doing a Google search to verify claims. Rathee warns that fake news often plays on emotions, making people more likely to share it. For extra verification, he recommends fact-checking sites like SM Hookslayer and Webkoof. Likewise, StopFake, founded in 2014, uses crowdfunding to debunk false information, especially from Russian sources (Khaldarova and Pantti 2018).

### **Truth during Post Truth: Fall of Fact-Finders**

Fake news and misinformation continue to pose a threat in the post-truth era, despite the best efforts of fact-checking websites, media educators, and government initiatives (Waisbord 2017, 1867). The difficulties of public communication are not being sufficiently addressed by suggestions like social media cleansing and news literacy (Mihailidis and Viotta 2017, 441-454). Facts and objectivity are frequently eclipsed by emotions, biases, and personal convictions, which weakens democracy by facilitating the rapid spread of lies and hoaxes (López-Marcos and Pilar 2021, 36). Globally, empirical research is being conducted to evaluate these fact-checking organisations' efficacy.

Long before 2016 (Humprecht 2020, 310-327), fact-checking techniques gained popularity as a response to worries about fake news. They were first introduced in the US and later spread throughout Europe (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017, 211-236). These groups provide forums for communication between the public and journalists, encouraging cooperative partnerships (LaRose et al. 2021, 33). Despite having similar objectives, these agencies' precise goals and long-term plans are frequently unclear, which casts doubt on their efficacy (Pavleska et al. 2018, 1-28). Even though they were vital during the Covid pandemic, their influence is lessened in a post-truth setting where opinions are frequently shaped by beliefs rather than facts (Luengo and García Marín 2020, 405-427). Furthermore, their sustainability is hampered by their lack of partnership with mainstream media and attribution problems (Graves and Cherubini 2016, 26).

In the post-truth era, fact-checkers are important, but they are only one voice. Supposing you rely only on them does not ensure objectivity. Transparency in these services' management, funding sources, and operations should be given top priority. Reaching sceptics online presents difficulties because of prejudice and a lack of trust (Brandtzaeg and Folstad 2017, 65-71). Gaining users' trust through transparency in business dealings and political neutrality is essential for success (Humprecht 2020, 65-71).

A fact-checker's discovery of search engine shortcomings in mainstream news organisations were highlighted in many studies recent study. Enhancing tool value is the goal of suggested solutions, particularly when expert consultation is involved (Procter et al. 2023). The heterogeneity in fact-finding processes underscores the need for ongoing collective efforts, hindered by financial constraints and waning motivation (Tolmie et al. 2017, 3632-3644). Fact-checkers are frequently drawn to confirmation bias because it is particularly evident in contentious or political matters. Attempts to lessen public deception may unintentionally be hampered by this prejudice. Fact-checkers need to find better ways to communicate their findings to the public in order to improve accessibility and reliability (Humprecht 2020, 310-327).

### **Recommendations and Way Forward**

Post-truth deranges journalism's democratic quality by increasing falsehood and allowing unrelated belief communities with contradictory opinions, challenging rationalist integrity. (Waisbord, 2017). Social media platforms can restrict fake news by limiting engagement with major fake news sources and adopting policies like algorithmic relegation for people who post frequently or encouraging those who have not posted anything that day (Roberts 2018). Waisbord has suggested some analysis patterns about news and truth in the time of post truth. First, integrating the study of journalism and truth must adjust itself with the vigorous communication environment, placing journalistic standards and ethics within growing conditions for public communication and fact-telling. Second, a reconsideration of classic arguments theorized in different eras for public communication is essential, considering the renovated socio-political and economic conditions. And third, re-evaluating conservative values of journalism by urging scholars to evade instinctive loyalty to old-fashioned standards and welcoming the growing nature of communication having no affiliation with the established standards of the past. Delicate tactics to address these issues are pertinent (Waisbord 2017).

In a digital dominion, a digital dilemma calls for a digital solution. Following the 2016 US presidential elections, many scientific communities have joined forces to challenge the issue of fake news by devising



automated mechanisms that discern factual information from news. In the face of a mounting challenge of distinguishing truth from an ocean of falsehoods, scientists have now united to innovate digital techniques aimed at combating counterfeit information. In view of the problems faced by fact checking agencies, and due to tremendous increase in online media outlets and the automated spreading of misinformation through social bots puts fact-finding out of the reach of human efforts, and thus computerized apparatuses are essential, which are now increasingly being explored today by the researchers from scientific communities (Cazalens, et. al. 2018).

### **The Rise of Deepfake**

Twitter, now X, has recently introduced a striking feature called 'community notes,' allowing users to add additional information to tweets which is a valuable tool in countering spread of fake news. This feature stands out in contrast to other social media platforms that often offer the option to 'switch off' comments, inadvertently creating a favourable environment for the peddlers of fake news to disseminate false information and preventing user engagement.

A recent shocking incident highlights the urgency of this matter, where a deep fake video featuring Bollywood star Rashmika Mandanna spread rapidly on various social media, showing her in a compromising state. The event triggered a widespread anxiety across numerous facets of society. The application of artificial intelligence in creating this deceptive content has turned into a near-perfect reproduction, making it extremely difficult to spot any error even after watching it multiple times. The gravity of the situation prompted an outburst of reactions on social media platforms, with many prominent figures, including politicians, journalists, and scholars, taking to Twitter expressing their concern. Calls for the government to adopt stern policies and regulations against the propagation of fake news and deep fakes have gained traction in response to this unsettling incident.

If the government wishes, it can effortlessly hold accountable anyone associated with these cyber-crimes. A dialogue from a Bollywood film "Khakee," directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, released in 2004, have a particular relevance here. In a crucial scene, ACP Anant Shrivastava, played by superstar Amitabh Bachchan and his team, reach a point of desperation, having no support from his own police department and the government. In a gripping monologue, he stresses upon the motto of the Indian police and the authority vested in them, and states, "*...Apraadhi to chhoriye, police department agar chaahey, aur sarkar ijaazat de, to shahar me koi chotey bachche ka khilon bhi nahi chheen sakta.*" (Leave the culprit, if the

police department desires and the government grants permission, they couldn't even snatch a toy from the hands of a small child) (Khakee, 01:50:17., 2004). The government should and must take conclusive measures to fight the propagandists and the spreaders of fake news in this post-truth era. Simultaneously, individuals also bear responsibilities to behave cautiously, particularly when sharing information on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and others. Users should use their critical thinking skills and question the credibility of the content before sharing it online. While we may have plenty of answers, the shortage lies in asking the right questions.

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## Unlatching the Caged Truth: A Refugee Woman's Narration of Genocide as an Act of Rebellion

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### Abstract

*The prevailing stereotypes surrounding women's writing, which often pigeonhole them as creators of tender, imaginative narratives divorced from harsh realities, is challenged in this scholarly analysis. Despite the socially existing biases, it asserts the critical importance of engaging with the raw and authentic voices of women who courageously articulate the suffering of the marginalized, particularly refugee women who endure compounded forms of oppression. These women, long silenced by societal norms, exhibit remarkable bravery in bearing witness to truth through their literary works, even amidst the threats of violence and intimidation. Refugee women emerge as muted narrators in a world characterized by arrogance and indifference, their narratives underscoring the urgency of sharing their stories to combat the scourge of statelessness and advocate for their dignity and that of their communities. However, they often find themselves denied even the most basic rights and necessities, condemned to suffer and perish in silence, deprived of the opportunity to articulate their experiences of oppression. Yet, a select few refugees who manage to escape persecution and find refuge in safer environments bravely confront the consequences of sharing their testimonies of hatred, warfare, bloodshed, and brutality, using both spoken and written words to expose the raw truth of their lived experiences. This paper undertakes a rigorous analysis of the profound narrative offered by a refugee woman recounting a genocide and its aftermath, focusing on Sandra Uwiringiyimana's memoir, *How Dare the Sun Rise*, with the aim of elucidating the depth and significance of such testimonies and their potential to catalyze meaningful social changes.*

Keywords: Refugee, Women, Oppression, Genocide and Writing.

Human beings are born into the world with diverse identities and are raised amidst various forms of discrimination. As they mature, they learn to adapt to the societal imbalances they encounter. Eventually, adaptation and adjustment become integral parts of their lives until they are confronted with a profound crisis, compelling them to fight for their rights to survive in a society of inequality. Refugees represent one such oppressed demographic, often deprived of even the most basic rights and necessities. As Guy S Goodwin-Gill (2021, 23-42) aptly note, 'The situation of refugees was by no means uniform, and policy

and practice often reflected the nature and extent of the problem faced by different States.’ In the world of power and politics where people are discriminated based on their identity, the refugee community consists of pathetic people who are oppressed as they become humans with no identity at all.

Among the many rights denied to refugees, the suppression of their fundamental right to speak is particularly significant, hindering their ability to pursue other rights and needs. Unable to vocalize the injustices they endure; they suffer in silence and anguish. Refugees rarely get the privilege to speak up for themselves and always depend on others to voice out the problems. ‘The various types of research evidence, when taken together, demonstrate the tenuousness of ‘no problem here’ arguments. Until such investigations have been carried out, most ethnic discrimination remains out of sight’ (Wrench 2016, 118-123). While only a few refugees manage to attain a platform to advocate for their community, often at the cost of their lives, individuals like Sandra Uwiringiyimana recognize it as their paramount duty to speak out despite the inherent dangers. This article examines the audacity of her decision to pen a memoir detailing the genocide at the Darfur Refugee camp and its aftermath.

Violence has always been the greatest weapon used by oppressors against the communities they target. The refugees being a weak group of people with no rights or identity, are attacked and made to go through different forms of violence. ‘While direct violence refers to the (threat of) physical or psychological violence, acted out by one person against another, structural violence, in contrast, points to forms of injustice built into a social system or institution that privileges some while preventing others from fulfilling their basic human needs’ (Hartmann 2017, 102-126). Genocides are brutal and inhumane form of violence targeted on the minorities, which ends up killing and paralysing innocent lives. The oppressors, wielding extreme power over the oppressed, treat them as less than animals and show no remorse for massacring them in large numbers.

The first and foremost refugee crisis occurred during World War II in Europe, which lasted from 1939 to 1945. Over the course of six years, around forty to sixty million refugees were displaced to camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy. The primary cause of this brutal crisis was the hatred propagated by leaders in power, resulting in ethnic cleansing and genocide. In the Indian subcontinent, millions became refugees during the partition in 1947 and the Bangladesh Liberation War from 1971 to 1979. One of the most significant refugee crises began in Syria in 2011 due to the Syrian civil war, with millions still seeking refuge around the world to this day. Other ongoing conflicts continue to generate millions of refugees, including the eight-year-long Venezuelan crisis, the Ukrainian crisis of recent months, the seventy-five-



year-old Palestinian crisis, the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar, and the Somali Civil War, which started in 1991.

The ethnic clashes and conflicts are taken to an extreme by oppressors, who are willing to kill and destroy the lives of the oppressed. They do not see them as humans but rather as embodiments of hatred and disgust. It is this hatred of the powerful oppressors that drives them to destroy the lives of the oppressed, force them to flee from their homes, strip them of all their rights, and kill them regardless of their age or gender. 'States must recognize that lasting solutions to the problem of displaced people will only be found if a concerted effort is made to defuse ethnic and religious tensions, resolve armed conflicts, protect human rights, strengthen arms control measures, and promote equitable and sustainable development' (Loescher 2021, 117-126). It is the abolishment of these conflicts that would prevent genocides that are characterized by bloodshed, death, fire, wounds, rape, cruelty, brutality, and all other forms of evil that can instill fear in a person for a lifetime.

The genocide detailed in the selected memoir highlights one such atrocity that has plagued the lives of its victims for years. 'Even by conservative estimates, over 4,000 people have been killed in Sudan since the armed conflict began. The true number is likely much higher, owing to difficulties identifying, accessing, and retrieving bodies amidst ongoing fighting' (SOAS University of London 2023). These genocides are initiated by oppressors with the intention of permanently destroying the lives of their victims. In the selected memoir, Sandra Uwiringiyimana elaborates on how the barbarity of the Darfur camp affects families and fellow refugees at various levels and phases of their lives.

*How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* is a memoir by Sandra Uwiringiyimana, written with the assistance of Abigail Pesta. In this memoir, Uwiringiyimana breaks her own barriers of trauma, recounting the hardships she endured as a child during a genocide and reflecting on the miseries she faced from the moment she became a refugee. The memoir begins with her peaceful childhood in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she and her siblings had little to worry about. Uwiringiyimana and her family belong to a minority tribe called the Banyamulenge and had migrated from their native Rwanda to Congo in 1996 when she was just two years old. Upon their arrival in Congo, they felt at home, identified themselves as Congolese citizens, and grew to love the country. The children cherished the love of nature and enjoyed their surroundings, celebrating their childhood with good friends. Until Uwiringiyimana was six years old, they experienced no serious discrimination. However, Uwiringiyimana's life drastically changed one day when oppressors declared that certain tribes did not belong in their land. Suddenly, they lost everything and became refugees in the Darfur camp, where they faced the greatest tragedy of their lives.

During their stay at the Burundi camp, Uwiringiyimana faces the worst tragedy of her life. One night, her family experiences genocide, enduring a harrowing night of life and death. More than being traumatized by fleeing for their lives throughout the night, it is the death of her beloved sister that haunts Uwiringiyimana for the rest of her life. The night of bomb blasts and gunshots lingers in her mind for a long time, and the loss of her little sister, who looked up to her, leaves her feeling half-dead. Deborah, her sister, was an innocent six-year-old who had no understanding of why the genocide was happening, and Uwiringiyimana agonizes over the senseless killing of the harmless child. The family's decision to avoid discussing their grief with each other only adds to Uwiringiyimana's pain. Real redemption from this trauma only comes when Uwiringiyimana finally expresses her repressed thoughts and emotions while speaking up for her people at a public gathering. From that moment on, she continues to speak and write with a courageous tone about what has happened to their people, relentlessly seeking justice through her words.

Researching and writing about the sufferings of refugees would not be appropriate if the analyst fails to detail the facts of the inhuman oppressions experienced by women refugees worldwide. There are numerous articles highlighting their sufferings, including leaving their homes, facing assault, and surviving amidst abuse in camps. 'Although both women and men face violence during and after conflict, they experience violence differently. Sexual violence targets mostly women, but many boys and men are also raped during armed conflict' (Akhter 2014, 225-246). Sources differentiate the problems faced by refugees of different genders, with most articles specifying that women and girls are the most affected. 'Rape is accepted as a strategy in genocide or ethnic cleansing; the notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' are invoked to wipe out the 'polluted' or pollute the 'other'' (Mohsin 2019, 1-14). Women are raped by enemies to showcase superiority, and the idea of impurity attached to rape is used to degrade their quality of life. 'Women's agency is constituted through memory and action. Their oral recollections represent a powerful narrative of resistance to both Israeli invasion and the violence of their own societies' (Holt 2013, 316-317). Articles and researches on refugees not only cover the tears and trauma of suffering but also the bravery of resistance and revolt.

Sandra Uwiringiyimana is one of the few refugees who have the opportunity to resettle in America and pursue an education at a reputable institution. Unfortunately, along with assimilation comes other challenges of survival in her new homeland. Uwiringiyimana, who has faced discrimination since childhood, is now confronted with new forms of discrimination in her adopted country. She experiences racial discrimination, a phenomenon unfamiliar to her in her homeland. These new challenges trigger all her trauma from the genocide, leading to constant traumatic nightmares. This further underscores that any

form of discrimination perpetrated by those in positions of privilege and power results in severe difficulties for the powerless victims, particularly refugees. ‘Many Rwandan people residing in Finland, having survived the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi and its aftermath, continue to suffer from the social and psychological wounds left by ethnic violence and genocide’ (Banyanga 2017). Minimal hatred nurtured over time can lead people to a point where they are willing to inflict torture and torment on their fellow human beings, creating a society that is akin to hell on earth for the oppressed.

The powerful continue to engage in activities that enable them to maintain their power by putting the powerless in danger. The refugees not only underwent social adaptations but also psychological adaptations to endure a life of trauma and hardship. Although they were unfamiliar with coping mechanisms for trauma, they gradually learned how to support each other as a family in overcoming their harrowing past. ‘Mom cried all the time. Everyone did. We would be sitting around, in our usual zoned-out state, and someone would suddenly cry. No one would question the reason for the tears. It was just part of our new life’ (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 23). Having experienced the genocide together, the family understood each other better than any therapist could. They quietly allowed each other to cry, as silence was what they needed when overwhelmed with emotion. Even when tears flowed without an apparent cause, they still understood and remained silent. Together, they faced their mental struggles and demonstrated resilience as a family, coping with their trauma.

The other major acts of resilience that Uwiringiyimana undertakes in order to survive include the therapy sessions she attends in college. Although seeking therapy and discussing one's trauma with someone else is not customary in her culture, she views it as a necessary step in overcoming her trauma and demonstrating her resilience in handling her past. Her American friends assist her in starting therapy, and eventually, she opens up to her therapist, even though initially, it was challenging for her to do so. Uwiringiyimana's decision to take initiative is itself a significant act of resilience, as she takes steps to move forward rather than remaining stuck in her traumatic past. Other steps include her initiative to connect with all the refugees who experienced the genocide, utilizing social media for assistance. Reaching out to those who can empathize with her experiences was a significant stride in the resilience process. Additionally, the idea of revisiting the camps and understanding the ongoing struggles of the people there was another important action that transitioned her resilience from an individual level to a community level.

Uwiringiyimana decides to share her story with the world, as a rebel who would rather die than remain silent, speaking only the truth. She realizes the power of her words and how much they hinder the oppressors, who try relentlessly to silence her and suppress the truth of their atrocities. Her testimony also

proves to be an invaluable to other refugees seeking assistance. She states, 'That is my story. I will tell it to anyone who will listen. Not because it is easy. Every time I tell it, I am back in Gatumba, a ten-year-old burning in a tent. But as long as the criminal who admitted to leading that massacre continues to walk freely in the streets of Burundi, I have no choice' (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 126). Uwiringiyimana acknowledges that revisiting the past, where she lost her little sister in a genocide, and sharing her story with the world was not an easy task. However, she chooses to do so as a resilient warrior standing for the justice of her people.

The writer presents the facts about the tribe in a manner that unmistakably conveys the truth about its people. Uwiringiyimana ensures that any prejudices fabricated against the tribe by oppressors are dispelled in her writing. She states, 'The tribe migrated for several reasons, including civil war and discrimination at home, as well as the fact that the mountains held an abundance of grasslands—a paradise for grazing cows. My people are famous for cattle farming. We are known for being a strong, strapping group, healthy from drinking lots of milk straight from the cow' (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 54). Additionally, Uwiringiyimana utilizes her platform to highlight the occupation and livelihood of the tribe. There is a sense of pride in sharing with others the prosperous land they hail from and the political factors that led to their departure from their once comfortable homeland. Her writing reflects how they had everything they desired in their land but were driven away due to the greed and wrongdoing of certain individuals.

Uwiringiyimana employs her writing as a tool to narrate the history of how many people in power have manipulated the Banyamulenge tribe for their political agendas, leaving the oppressed with no choice but to comply in order to survive. The tribe has done whatever they could, even if it meant acting against their will, simply to endure. Despite enduring the struggles of aligning themselves with various factions in the country's political conflicts, they were never acknowledged as citizens of Congo and were ultimately driven away without any respect. 'So many of my people today are languishing in refugee camps, belonging to no country, always in limbo' (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 147). The writer vividly portrays how the people demonstrated resilience in attempting to secure their place in the country, only to be discarded once they were no longer useful to those in power. Despite their resilience in cultivating a sense of belonging to the land, they were deemed unnecessary and forced to flee, abruptly shattering years of resilience within the tribe.

The refugees must remain resilient in the face of the challenges they encounter, ensuring they maintain their self-respect. Biased ideas about refugees persist among other citizens, often viewing them as individuals constantly in need of assistance, leading to the mistaken belief that they would readily accept anything

offered to them. Uwiringiyimana demonstrates resilience while maintaining her self-respect, particularly when it comes to accepting help from others. ‘Yes, we were refugees, but it didn’t mean we had no fashion sense. Back home in Congo, our clothes were tailored, and they fit beautifully. People in America seemed to assume that we were coming from an undeveloped land where we had no decent clothes. But we knew style. And we had seen plenty of American music videos. We knew what Americans wore. I didn’t want to get bullied out of school in Rochester for wearing a voluminous denim skirt’ (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 17). Uwiringiyimana and her sister, by carefully selecting clothes that suit them, command respect that is often denied to refugees in foreign countries. She also highlights the great fashion sense of her homeland. This incident, as recounted in her memoir, serves as a testament to resilience, challenging misconceptions about refugees.

During her time in America and the process of assimilation, Uwiringiyimana embraces ideas that align with her ethics and morality. She consistently questions and rejects cultural norms that contradict her life principles. ‘The boobs on the Barbies were another matter. I thought they were so inappropriate! They actually made me uncomfortable. I wondered why kids would want to play with dolls that were so developed. The dolls seemed like they were made for adults, not kids. Children don’t have gigantic boobs. Why did their dolls have them?’ (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 73). Uwiringiyimana fearlessly questions anything she believes is not beneficial to society and future generations. Through this approach, she sheds the insecurity of being in a place other than her home, and she confidently challenges the flaws of her new homeland just as she does with her homeland.

Uwiringiyimana demonstrates remarkable resilience when it comes to persevering in her pursuit of education. Despite being a top scorer in her home country and having a passion for education, she faces significant challenges in adapting to the unfamiliar education system in America. Nevertheless, she approaches her schooling with diligence and emerges as a dedicated learner. ‘I was supposed to be in eighth grade, as I had finished seventh grade in Rwanda. But in America, I got placed in sixth grade. I had worked so hard on my education, and this felt like a setback. I knew I was being demoted because I didn’t speak English, but this made me angry. How would being in a lower grade help me learn English?’ (Uwiringiyimana 2017, 15). Uwiringiyimana does not dwell on how she will tackle the standard curriculum; instead, she is frustrated by her demotion. She firmly believes that she will excel in her schooling and succeed in life. Aware that she will need to work harder than her peers, she is prepared to put in any amount of effort to obtain an education. She demonstrates resilience in her pursuit of a good education, recognizing its importance in improving the lives of her refugee community as a whole.

Sandra Uwiringiyimana is not someone who wrote out of hobby or passion; rather, she wrote out of necessity for survival, alongside her people. The more she documented the truth about the brutality and cruelty of refugee lives, the closer her people came to attaining basic needs and rights. Particularly, her act of recording their lives in writing serves as a powerful means of preserving their struggles, oppression, and resistance for generations to come. Considering Sandra's circumstances, her decision to write is a significant step forward. However, in the broader context, this represents only a small stride toward achieving equality and abolishing discrimination. While efforts to elevate refugees to a recognized legal category and establish certain rights for them represent progress, these advancements are often overshadowed by claims of national interest and security concerns (Goodwin-Gill 2021, 23-42). Once a disaster occurs, revitalizing the affected area becomes exceedingly challenging. Prevention remains the only viable option to avert the world from its current trajectory, and peace and love stand as the ultimate antidotes to the weapons of genocide.

In conclusion, this scholarly analysis challenges entrenched stereotypes that often confine women's writing to realms of tender fiction divorced from harsh realities. It emphasizes the critical importance of engaging with the authentic voices of women who fearlessly articulate the suffering of marginalized communities, particularly refugee women who endure layers of oppression. Despite facing societal norms that have long silenced them, these women exhibit extraordinary bravery in bearing witness to truth through their literary works, even amidst threats of violence and intimidation. They emerge as muted narrators in a world characterized by arrogance and indifference, underscoring the pressing need to share their stories to combat statelessness and advocate for their dignity and that of their communities. Although many are denied basic rights and necessities, consigned to suffer and perish in silence, a courageous few manage to escape persecution and find refuge, confronting the consequences of sharing their testimonies of hatred, warfare, and brutality. Through both spoken and written word, they expose the raw truth of their lived experiences, catalyzing meaningful social change. Through an in-depth analysis of Sandra Uwiringiyimana's memoir, *How Dare the Sun Rise*, this paper sheds light on the profound narrative offered by refugee women, illuminating the depth and significance of their testimonies in shaping collective consciousness and driving towards a more just and compassionate society.

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## **Lived Experiences of Female Faculty Members in the Neoliberal Academic Environment in Contemporary India**

**Nandini Biswas and Komal Beri**

### **Abstract**

*There is a growing body of literature on the influence of neoliberalism in higher education. The experiences and identities of academicians under neoliberal education systems have received considerable research attention. This paper analyses the lived experiences of female academicians in the neoliberal university system in India. By examining the intersecting influences of neoliberalism, changing academic settings, pressures of performativity and structural barriers, female academics' experiences in neoliberal academia were explored. 14 in-depth interviews with female academicians working in various private universities in the National Capital Region of India provided the basis for our study. The emerging themes highlighted the challenges faced by women academicians in a neoliberal context. Findings from our study revealed that the demands of a neoliberal system accentuated the difficulties faced by female faculty members belonging to a highly conservative gender culture. Motherhood emerged as one of the strongest motives affecting the career choices of women in academia. Undeterred by the onslaught of neoliberalism in an already gendered professional landscape, female academicians were able to carve out a niche identity for themselves. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the findings on research and practice.*

### **Keywords**

Neoliberalism, academia, female academicians, higher education

### **Introduction**

The adoption of neoliberal ideology in higher education (HE) is a hotly debated topic among academics, intellectuals, and policymakers. Market organization principles started making their appearance in the higher education and public research spaces of the United States and most of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries since the eighties, and subsequently gained credence in other geographies as well (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315). The political philosophy of neoliberalism advocates free trade, globalization, market orientation and individual entrepreneurial freedom, among other things. Neoliberalism has its roots in the ideology of free market capitalism in the nineteenth century (Carlquist and



Phelps 2014, 1232). Still, it has been recast as a distinct set of ideas following its resurgence in the twentieth century. The neoliberal philosophy is deeply sceptical of governmental control of the free market and wishes to restrict it to the creation of the right operating conditions. On the other hand, it endorses wholeheartedly the participation of the private sector in all sorts of economic activities (Connell 2010, 23-24).

The winds of neoliberal economic reforms spread globally via the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). After the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, the country undertook widespread market reforms. The first seeds of neoliberalism in the higher education sector were sown following the adoption of neoliberal policy agendas in India's national economic development. The Private Universities Act in 1995 was a significant move in this direction. Subsequently, the National Knowledge Commission (2007), The Yash Pal Committee (2009) and the Narayan Murthy Committee appointed by the Planning Commission (2012) argued for greater participation and autonomy of the private sector in the higher education space in India (Chattopadhyay 2009, 54; Sahoo 2023, 27-28).

The ideological shift caused by the adoption of neoliberal policies in higher education had remarkable effects worldwide on the way education was imparted as well as on the stakeholders. Neoliberalism has been criticised for shifting the primary goal of education from creating free-thinking individuals with social knowledge and citizenship values to mass-producing skilled minions as per the demands of the labour market (Gyamera and Burke 2018, 454). Under the new system, the identity of learners has been transformed into paying customers, who are entitled to certain privileges and manners of treatment. The academia's identity has undergone a radical change from a loosely controlled hallowed institution of learning to a large-sized academic enterprise (Anderson 2008, 251-252). Some researchers argued that the commodification of education has led to a watering down of its standards (Chattopadhyay and Sharma 2019, 294). To justify the returns on investment made by neoliberal universities, high demands of performativity and accountability are placed on staff members (Ball 2012, 19-23). Free market-based competition requires that excellence in teaching and research be captured through various performance metrics, which will be used to position the university as a favoured destination of choice for prospective customers. This relentless demand for performance has ushered in an audit culture pretty much in line with business corporations (Shore 2008, 278). Caught in the crosshairs of these changes are teachers and researchers who must renegotiate their professional identities in a highly competitive world (Archer 2008, 267-268; Davies and Petersen 2005, 46-51).

Although the pressures of performativity and meritocracy affect everyone in academia, often extracting a personal toll, we argue that these pressures tend to affect male and female faculty members differently. India's female labour force participation rates have been traditionally low, even though the country has made significant strides in recent years in this regard (Kumar 2024). Strong gender norms along with expectations of household responsibilities and childcare are some of the strongest reasons behind this phenomenon. Globally, women occupy lower ranks in the organizational hierarchy, have slower career progression, and face difficulty obtaining leadership positions (Xie and Shauman 2003, chap. 1). Education sector in India is considered one of the preferred sectors for women due to its emphasis on work-life balance. However, the neoliberal turn in higher education in recent years is affecting this in many ways. The changing organizational culture is progressively endorsing traditional masculine values such as aggression, competitiveness and individualism, which is making it increasingly difficult for women to enter and survive the 'academic game' (Vohlídalová 2021, 29). To cut expenses, neoliberal universities have resorted to increased casualization of the workforce (Gill 2016, 44). This has not only affected job security but also caused a paring down of privileges such as leaves and benefits which previously attracted female talent to the sector. Measures such as these have given rise to a new class of 'precarious academics' (Loveday 2018, 155-156). Using the Foucauldian lens of the homo economicus, commentators have shown how 'neoliberal subjectification' of academicians helps to preserve the selfish interests of the academy (Morrish and Sauntson 2019, chap. 6). The new norms of academic excellence advanced by neoliberal governmentality require commendable publication records in high-ranking journals, an uninterrupted career, a history of winning large grants and excellent networking in the professional community (Skea 2021, 400-403). We argue that these demand characteristics are inherently biased to favour men, since women's careers are more likely to be punctuated by breaks, trace a non-linear growth path, and limited by the constraints of time and geographical mobility.

Although the lived experience of female academics in the neoliberal university system has received considerable research attention in the global North, such voices and narratives are wanting from the global South, including India. Guided by this intellectual curiosity and partially from our interest as teaching professionals in HE, we sought to understand what it means to be a female academic in the neoliberal university set-up in India.

## **Methodology**

Our analysis is based on 14 in-depth interviews carried out between October 2023 and January 2024 with women academics employed in different private universities in the National Capital Region of India. The respondents had varying degrees of experience in HE ranging from 5 to 12 years, and came from a range of disciplines in the natural and technical sciences as well as social sciences and humanities. All the respondents were married, and except three, all of them had children. We analysed the data using reflexive thematic analysis following the method proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87). Each of us independently coded the data to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the process and generated initial themes following a constructionist approach. We resolved any discrepancy between themes through mutual discussion and concluded by developing an agreed-upon set of themes. We followed an iterative approach throughout the process, going back and forth between different stages as required.

## **Results and discussion**

### **A crisis of professional identity**

A profound sentiment sweeping through the interviews came from a sense of professional identity confusion experienced by the respondents. Most of them entered the profession with an idealized vision of higher education, derived partially from their own experience of the academy as students and to an extent the construction of the profession as an 'ivory tower' in popular narrative (Lam 2010, 308). Therefore, the reality of the neoliberal workplaces came as a shock to them in the early days of their career. Several of our respondents expressed a sense of nostalgia about the golden era of academia (Graham 2002, 119-121) and pined for the academic freedom which is still enjoyed in legacy universities.

The respondents resented governmentality in their workplaces as it directly conflicted with their desire to spend time doing 'real' academic work (Davies and Petersen 2005, 46-50) which is a strategic necessity to establish their identities as researchers. Of major concern was the triviality of the work (Kouritzin et al. 2020, 42) that consumed most of their time. This arose from multiple administrative duties, which should ideally have been handled by non-teaching staff but were bundled off under the teaching role in the neoliberal system. The respondents not only saw this as of limited value to their personal growth but also highlighted the invisible

nature of this work when it came to formal appraisals within the university. Several of our respondents underscored the critical importance of high-value research output for growth within and outside the institution. Therefore, a major paradox was to continue in a workplace which was blocking their career growth through the pressures of performativity.

*'On an average I spend forty per cent of my workday into non-academic administrative work. I am into admissions, I am in the school research committee, I am in one of the NAAC criterion, which takes up six to seven hours of my time in a week. Then I must conduct events and extension activities with my students - planning, executing and reporting these events take a lot of time. Almost every day some meeting request comes up which doesn't involve me directly, but I have to sit through it as I am part of the department. Even for marking attendance every day, uploading the syllabus on the student portal, filling in marks, downloading grade sheets for entire groups of students - these small tasks, these things become very hectic actually.....requires a lot of brains to apply and a lot of energy which drains you eventually. On some days, I don't even have the time to sit at my desk. So, every day I am putting off my research to survive in the job. You can say I am doing the academic work but I am not being an academic.'*

Some respondents faulted neoliberal universities with a general lack of focus (Skea 2021, 401). They felt that the simultaneous and conflicting demands placed upon the teaching staff were symptomatic of this lack of focus.

*'Somewhere these universities are trying to do everything at the same time. Like jack of all trades, they are trying to make faculty members do everything. And doing everything means that the basic thing is getting lost. Sometimes I do not even have enough time to prepare for my classes.'*

### **Work-life balance under precarious employment conditions**

While the shrinking space for critical, creative and intellectual scholarship affects academia as a whole, the effect is far more pronounced in the life and career of female faculty members, since they are afforded little flexibility to absorb the additional pressure (Vohlídalová 2021, 39). A key theme running through the interviews was the conscious yet reluctant acceptance of neoliberal subjectivity by women academics as the inevitable consequence of their lived experience. Despite the deep resentment borne towards the culture of hyperperformativity (Macfarlane 2021, 459), they were unable to resist its insidious effect on their lives, relationships and well-being. The overwhelming anxiety to survive a precarious and fiercely competitive

academic world was compounded by strong feelings of guilt arising from the interference of work with home and childcare responsibilities.

The snippets below from two different interviews show how the non-negotiable demand to be constantly on call after office hours disturbed the work-life balance of female faculty members and drove them to the point of exhaustion:

*'These days you cannot stay away from work after office hours. You must be available to students all the time. So a lot of time I am with my daughter, but I am busy either on the phone or on the laptop. Some days I feel that I am giving more time to students than my daughter when I am at home.'*

*'Sometimes I get so frustrated that I take out that frustration on my kids. I think this happens to all of us.....Yes, it affects my physical health too. At times I suffer from low BP. At times I suffer from migraine attacks. These are stress reactions.'*

Respondents also pointed out how the terms of their contractual employment deprived them of benefits such as academic leaves, summer vacation and maternity leaves (Jones and Floyd 2024, 95) which slowed down their career progression, and in some cases stalled their careers altogether.

*'My university has a policy of giving maternity leave only after a year of employment. So I resigned and re-joined the same university after the break. But the previous university I worked with did not have such a maternity policy. Some of the universities are not following the guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. That needs to be taken care of.'*

### **Professional development as a casualty**

An unmistakable sign of the neoliberal transformation of HE is the increased competition among institutions for limited resources and prestige (Musambira et al. 2012, 235). Tightening norms of accountability in higher education in India have introduced a set of performance metrics for evaluating teaching and research excellence through institutional accreditation. This has intensified competition for publications in high-impact research journals, membership in prestigious professional bodies and winning substantial research grants. Faculty members in private universities which follow a lean operating model must work extra hours for their

professional development. Respondents in our study narrated how they risk falling back into the academic game due to time and mobility constraints.

*'I can't devote as much time to research as my male colleagues. We have to work from home, which gets very difficult to do. Because eight hours I am spending at office plus two hours of travel every day. I am giving ten hours daily, I can't give more than this in research or any other work. I have to cook, I have to take care of my children, I have to take the elder one to tuitions. I have to do household activities. Obviously this affects women's career advancement. It affects both the research output and the quality of research.'*

Some respondents also pointed out how the competing priorities in their lives make them lose out on networking opportunities, which is a key necessity for entering and being part of elite clubs.

*'I can't really spare time like male colleagues for networking. I can't travel to other cities frequently to attend conferences, and meetings, or stay out late in the evenings or weekends for these engagements. Women like me cannot always afford to do that.'*

#### **A woman or an academic: a profound dilemma and limited choice**

Historically, gender roles are deeply entrenched in the Indian society. Despite progressively scaling new heights in women's educational enrolment and employment status, these deep-seated stereotypes still pose formidable structural barriers against women's advancement in a tightly defined professional world. The traditional society places strong and inflexible expectations on women regarding their roles as wives, mothers and caregivers. In a neoliberal world, these foundational inequities serve to magnify the narrative of women being unsteady, and unreliable workers (Mula-Flacón et al. 2021, 2). Neoliberalism therefore puts women at a 'double disadvantage' in their careers. Throughout the interviews, we heard respondents recount the hard choices they had to make concerning important life decisions. Career interruption was a common theme running through the narratives, as was the women's choice to reluctantly make peace with the limited options available to them at important junctures of their lives. The following two snippets show how marriage came in the way of burgeoning careers:

*'I did not have much say over my marriage. I grew up in a conservative family where the expectations from a dutiful daughter was not up for discussion. I was married off soon after university. So I practically had no time to think through my career path, even though I was a topper at the university. Mine was an arranged marriage.'*

*I had to make overwhelming adjustments following my marriage. It was difficult. There was hardly any support for my career.'*

*'I was in a government job before marriage, but I left it to move to the city after marriage. I had no option but to leave my job to be with my husband and in-laws. I mean, being a woman, you face social pressure to conform to the norms applicable to you.'*

Relocation post-marriage was a common yet difficult choice. Respondents narrated how this forced a brake upon their career or marred its progress.

*'Relocation abroad interrupted my academic career, as I was not finding suitable jobs in academia there. After returning to India, it took me quite some time to land my first interview. Despite being a PhD and having ample experience, I had to accept a salary lower than what I was previously drawing. The gap exists even today after five years.'*

However, the strongest dilemma revolved around motherhood. In earlier studies, academic moms talked of feeling helpless, trying to make ends meet, and ultimately failing (Toffoletti and Starr 2016, 490). Some respondents' experiences of motherhood delve into the question of whether or not academia can ever be fit around motherhood. Despite the respondents exuding pride in being working moms and recounting pregnancy as an enjoyable experience, they could not shun the feelings of frustration and confusion while dealing with the dilemma of not being there for the child.

*'As a mother, you have to make a choice. That realization came upon me one day when my baby took very ill when I was in a different city on work. That made me switch to a part time role. Of course, my career suffered due to this. if I hadn't taken a break from the mainstream job. I would have been in a very senior position right now. So, when I look at my other colleagues who actually did not take any time off, I know the decision impacted my growth curve. I tried to rationalize a lot, you, know, but the mother's guilt doesn't go away.'*

Some of the respondents pointed out how female academics must negotiate the demands of 'multiple stakeholders', which included not only their spouse and children but in-laws and extended families while making professional decisions for themselves. The pressure of constantly being scrutinized, judged or criticised on arbitrary norms of perfection in the roles of mother, wife and in-law severely affected the self-esteem and identity of the academics.

Even then, a strong sense of resilience shone through the accounts. While trying to work out a balance between a ruthlessly competitive neoliberal system on the one hand, and exacting demands at home on the other, the women showed remarkable grit and perseverance to survive and rise in academia. In the process, they accepted the tears, the regrets, the psychological scars, the fear and exhaustion as part of the game of not giving up. They crafted alternate career identities for themselves wherever a conventional path was not feasible. The journey frequently involved long and painful attitudinal reorientation to adjust to the stark realities of life. The female academics gratefully acknowledged the contribution of family members, friends and peers in their careers. But it should not be forgotten that ultimately it was the women themselves who wrote the saga of personal triumphs.

## Conclusion

This study provided an overview of female academicians' experiences and perspectives of working in neoliberal academic environments in India. The lived experiences make room for thought on the transition and unpredictability of academia, especially in today's world when academics are under immense pressure to succeed. The experiences of female academics in neoliberal academia were explored by analysing the intersecting effects of performativity, systemic forces and evolving reforms in academia.

The present study shows that despite neoliberal connotations of ruthless competitiveness and individual performativity, some female academics were able to stay committed to a career of deeper intellectual inquiry. Therefore, it is essential to continue advocating for systemic changes that promote gender equity and create inclusive academic environments where all female academicians can thrive. There is a need for further research to deepen our understanding of the experiences of female academicians within private universities. Areas for future inquiry may include longitudinal studies tracking the career trajectories of female academicians, comparative analyses of support initiatives across institutions, and examinations of the intersectional identities of scholars in academia. By addressing these gaps in the literature, we can continue to advance knowledge and inform policy and practice in ways that promote gender equity and inclusivity within academia.

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## Freedom of Religion and Gender Equality in India: Debate on Women Entry into Sabarimala Temple

Nithya N.R.

### Abstract

*Despite making up nearly half of the population, women do not enjoy the same freedoms, equality, or privileges as males. Women have historically been marginalized, dehumanized, disposed, diminished, disenfranchised, secluded, subjugated and silenced. The study of gender equality and religious freedom typically examines the position of women within particular religious faith and religious doctrines relating to gender, gender roles and particular women in religious history. Most religions elevate the status of men over women have stricter sanctions against women and require them to be submissive. It seems ineffective to use religion as a means of achieving equality because religion is still ingrained in patriarchal practices and injustices. It will not result in achieving equality. The topic of prohibiting women aged between 10 and 50 from entering the Sabarimala temple has been a subject of longstanding controversy. The verdict on Sabarimala women entry is based on fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. But these rights appear to be competing for precedence in the view of controversies surrounding entry of women at certain places of worship. The paper delineates the position of women in religion, women's right to worship and the implications of Supreme Court verdict on women's entry into Sabarimala.*

**Keywords:** Women, Religion, Patriarchy, Constitutional Morality, Gender Equality, Sabarimala Temple

### Introduction

Religions have a patriarchal perspective on gender interactions; the issue of gender inequality within them is a reflection of cultural norms and conventional patriarchal and male-dominated mystical interpretations that have been experienced for ages to oppress women.

Patriarchal gender-based regimes have been effective in imposing their conservative, male-dominated, misogynistic religious interpretations to control and disregard women in a changing and dynamic society. The position of women in society is one of the crucial topics and dominant themes in the modern era. The desire for entering the sanctum of the temple is not new. Many houses of worship, such as temples and shrines, have employed customs as a means of excluding women from entering these sites. But such restrictions are in conflict with Indian law and our constitution. The fight for female equality in religion is upheld by Kerala's renaissance movements. Despite advancements to equality, religions overall still lag the rest of society in addressing gender issues. The temple at Sabarimala is open to people of all religions. The restriction on women entering the temple premises is being practised for centuries, as devotees consider Lord Ayappa, the presiding divinity of the temple, to be celibate. Such decisions are a breach of one's rights in a secular nation like India, which guarantees to uphold the rights of its inhabitants to practice any religion or creed they so choose (Anant 2016, p.125). In September 2018, the Indian Supreme Court agreed: it ruled the ban to be a breach of gender equality and ordered temple authorities to grant female pilgrims access. The Apex Court verdict on Sabarimala women entry is based on fundamental right. The Court has frequently strived to strike a balance between defending religious liberty and outlawing discrimination that is justifiably based on religious tradition (SC, 2018). The present study is largely based on secondary data.

### **Theorising Religion and Gender**

Gender refers to the duties and obligations that are socially established and deemed ideal for men and women in different communities. Simone de Beauvoir, felt that "Masculine is routinely portrayed as the positive (or the norm) whereas the feminine is depicted as inferior. Women be treated as equal to men and laws, customs and education must be altered to encourage this" (Simone, 1949, p.56). Gender parity denotes equal power and opportunity that men and women have in provisions of achieving financial independence, education, and personal advancement. Inequalities in gender and enduring discriminatory societal norms that dictate social responsibility and influence dynamics between men and women in society have

long been intertwined (UNDP 2019, p.3). A significant part of such research is based on the postulation that gender roles are primarily constructed through religion, culture, lifestyle and upbringing (King, 1995, p.35). Today, all major world religions uphold the social supremacy of men in societal systems (Sharma and Katheine 1987, p.56). There is an intricate connection between faith and gender equality. Furthermore, patriarchal characteristics, which permeate all civilizations associated with the global religions, may be reflected in religious conventions and prejudices (Nespor 2008, p.4). In spirituality, a woman is mainly recognized as a mother, particularly when raising a child. Men are always considered to be the role models for God or religion creators (Holm, and Bowker 1994, p.16). Gender roles and the position of women and men in civilization are deeply tied to the manner in which religious scripts have been articulated for centuries by those in positions of authority—positions held predominantly by men (Klingorova and Havlíček 2015, p. 2). Carol Christ in her book *Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* remarked that "Religions centered on the worship of a male God create 'moods' and 'motivations' that keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority, while at the same time legitimating the political and social authority of fathers and sons in the institutions of society" (Christ 2004, p.24). As a number of the studies indicate, however, relationships between representation and social enactment should be explored rather than assumed, for in practice a range of possible and sometimes surprising relationships are possible (Woodhead 2012, p.241).

### **Patriarchy and Oppression of Women**

Gender inequality stands as one of the widespread manifestations of social inequality, prevalent globally and manifesting distinct consequences across various regions (Inglehart and Norris 2003, p.38). When women are healthy and educated and can participate fully in society, they trigger progress in their families, communities and nations. However, they suffer greatly because they are deprived of equal opportunities across the globe due to the hegemonic masculine attitude. In many nations worldwide, empowerment of women and gender parity continue to be crucial issues for development. While most nations in the globe have not achieved gender parity, gender quotas have substantially contributed to progress over

the years (IPU 2023, p.4). As an independent group, women constitute 48.5% of the entire population of India. The literacy rates of men and women have never been the same. The national rate of female workforce participation is 25.51%, whereas the rate for males is 53.26% (Census, 2011). Women in Indian society are treated as secondary, which leaves them at a disadvantage in a number of areas. Because of this, governmental and non-governmental organizations have made women's social, political, and economic empowerment their top priority. Through a number of clauses, including declarations of fundamental rights and Directive principles, the constitution of independent India ensured justice, liberty, equality, and dignity to all of its residents. The drafters of the founding document understood that justice and equality are essential components of a true democratic system. It gives women equal rights and directs the government the authority to implement favourable discrimination measures that will assist in addressing the historical disadvantages faced by women in education, politics, and socio-economic spheres (Nithya 2019, P. 94).

### **Freedom of Religion in Indian Constitution**

India, most popularly acknowledged as the land of spiritual beliefs, philosophical thinking, culture, has also been the birthplace of quite a few number of religions out of which some of them exist in this era as well. 'Religion' is entirely a matter of choice, perception and belief. In the Constituent Assembly debate in 1948, Ambedkar felt that since secularism was inserted into the Constitution's framework, mentioning it in the preamble would be superfluous. The term "secular" was inserted into the Constitution's preamble in 1976 by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment. Since India is a secular nation, it does not have a state religion and does not practice any one religion (Jhawar 2020, p .6). The Apex Court in Ahmedabad St. Xavier's College v. State of Gujarat (1974) pronounced that "secularism is neither pro- nor anti-god". Articles 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution provide religious freedom. As a secular country, India grants its citizens the freedom to practice any religion they choose while they are living there. When patriarchy—the dominance of men over women—denies women agency or autonomy, it permeates religious settings. It is against women's fundamental rights to exclude them from places of worship. India's religious

freedom has been steadily fading for the past several years, and it is still getting worse. In 2022, the Indian government silenced critical voices particularly those of religious minorities through harassment, investigation, imprisonment, and prosecution under laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), Foreign Contribution Regulation Act and the Sedition Law (USCIRF 2023, p. 3).

### **Social Reform Movements and Kerala Modernity**

In the 19th century, Kerala witnessed a cultural and ideological struggle against the backward elements of traditional culture and the ideological hegemony of the Brahmins (Raman 2017, p. 24). Following the emergence of colonial modernity, the question of women's rights started to be discussed throughout the reform era. The nineteenth-century socio religious reform initiatives were instrumental in enhancing the position of women in the community. Women's organizations were founded in the 19th century by educated men and women from upper-caste elites. Women were encouraged to involve in community-based programs through the women's associations in each locality. These groups' establishment aided women in shedding their customary roles in society. It gave them an outlet for self-expression apart from their families. Many Malayalam periodicals promoted the necessity for women to have access to education, freedom, and movement, among other things (Ayyappan 1982, p. 96).

Traditionally women suffered directly from the male domination and this was aggravated by casteism and other social conventions that were common in Kerala in 19th century (Deshpande 2000, p. 323). Even when women of the higher caste might have enjoyed a marginally better position, compared to the lower caste families, they were also victims of sexual exploitation by members of the higher castes and of greater economic exploitation in wages than in the case of males. The Channar struggle brought about significant transformations in the social and political attitudes of the lower caste people in the erstwhile South Travancore (Pillai 1970, 67). The stages of modernisation, initiated in part through the introduction of English education and western liberal thoughts and the consequent efforts of the local rulers and social reformers to bring about social changes, went a long way in

shaping the present day social and political situation of the women. The increasing involvement of women in several socio-political movements enabled them to 'widen their interests and opened up new vistas before them.

Kerala's accomplishments in the areas of education, healthcare, agricultural reform, and habitat typically referred as the "Kerala Model of Development" (Franke & Chasin 1992, p. 156). The development model widely recognized as successful in Kerala can be credited to the progress made in the fields of health and education, where women have played a crucial role. According to Geraldine Frazer- Moleketi (2012), "Kerala's strength is the high levels of female literacy. Because when you educate a woman, you educate a family" (Global Director, United Nations Development). Kerala is frontrunner in the SDG India Index (2018, 2019, and 2020), NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty, The India Skills Report 2022 and other study reports. But several indicators of position of women demonstrate women in Kerala to be comparatively deprived as compared to men. There are increasing number of gender based violence, mainly domestic cruelty against women in Kerala (Eapen and Kodoth 2001, p. 45). Though women's participation has increased in local bodies, they still do not have the power to sway decisions.

### **Ayyappa Cult and the Entry of Women: History of the Debate**

Sabarimala is a prominent Hindu temple located on a hilltop in Pathanamthitta district. The origins of Sabarimala and the deity Ayyappa are veiled in mystery. Radhika Sekar's work "The Sabarimala Pilgrimage and Ayyappan Cults", stated "the major Puranic texts do not contain the myths and legends of Ayyappa". The sect is conventionally not found in the northern India. The only Sanskrit text that narrates the story of Ayyappan is the 19th century text Bhutanathopakhyanam. The deity, according to her, is also popular in Coorg and among castes and tribes of the West Coast (Sekar 1992, p. 47). According to M.N. Srinivas, (1952) "Ayyappa worship is not known further north than mid-Karnataka, where it was undoubtedly introduced from Kerala" (Srinivas 1952, p. 144). Owing to the notable absence of the god Ayyappa in traditional Ithihasa-Purana texts, it becomes challenging to classify the cult as



strictly adhering to Hindu tantric practices. It was not until the eighth century AD, with the arrival of Brahmin migrants, that Hindu temples following the Ithihasa-Purana tradition began to be constructed in Kerala. Many of these temples were situated in wetland regions. The notable thing is that the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple does not accept much consideration in ancient records (Jitheesh 2022, p. 98).

However, on the contrary, traces of non-Brahmin impact on the historical development of Sabarimala can be identified. T.A. Gopinatha Rao observes in “Elements of Hindu Iconography”, “Ayyanar is basically a village tutelary deity, worshipped by the lower castes. There are iconographical similarities between the two deities and etymologically too it appears to be feasible (Rao 2015, p. 567).” According to A. Sreedhara Menon, “Sabarimala history is more to do with Buddhism than with Brahmanism”. “Ayyappa devotees strictly follow non-violence, vegetarianism and abstention from sex during the two months before the pilgrimage. It resembles the Ahimsa principles practiced by Buddhists” (Sreedhara 2019, p. 165). Another distinctive aspect of the temple is the presence of Vavar, a Muslim deity, within its grounds. Additionally, there are traces of Christian influences. Sabarimala pilgrims often visit the Arthunkal church, where many of them offer their malas (prayer beads). This exemplifies the diverse religious culture. From this diverse identity, the Sabarimala site underwent a transition towards Brahmanical Hinduism, particularly in the twentieth century. As per temple's mythology, Lord Ayyappa is an avowed bachelor who has taken an oath of celibacy (The Wire, 12/Oct/2018). The restriction on the entry of women into the temple because the deity is celibate is just a reiteration of this belief and taboo. These faiths have been used as a tool by the Hindu patriarchal society to subjugate women and the Supreme Court rightly recognised the traces of this in the practise of the temple (Yogesh 2018, p.2).

Following the incident in 1950, the shrine has experienced notable alterations in its rituals. One significant change is the imposition of restrictions on women's entry. The ban on women entry in the Sabarimala temple has been in force only since 1991 (BBC, 2018). Prejudice against women based on notions of impurity and pollution connected with menstruation is a sign of exclusion. The prohibition was implemented according to Rule 3(b) of the Kerala

Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965. The idea that this limitation is a recent development is echoed in the ruling of the Kerala High Court. “Women used to visit the temple earlier. There was thus no strict prohibition for women to enter the Sabarimala temple in olden days,” the judgment read. “Both women below the age of menstruation and above the age of menstruation belong to the Sabarimala pilgrims” (The Wire, 12/Oct/2018).

### **Supreme Court Verdict on Sabarimala Women Entry**

The Background of the Sabarimala temple case starts from three decades ago. For centuries women were not permitted to enter in the Sabarimala shrine based on the biological ground of menstruation. Rule 3 (b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorization of Entry Rules, 1965) dictates that women aged 10 to 50, who are not permitted by tradition and practice, are prohibited from entering the temple. In 1991, April 5 another verdict was declared by a division of Bench of Kerala High Court had backed the limitation barring women from a specific age group from worshipping at the shrine (The Hindu, January 19, 2016 ).

In 1990, Mahendra files plea in Kerala High Court seeking ban on women entry to the temple. Kerala High Court upholds the age restriction on women of a particular age group entering the temple in 1991 . The Indian young lawyers association files plea in Supreme Court seeking in 2006 to ensure entry of female devotees between the age group of 10 to 50. In November 2007, the then LDF government of Kerala filed affidavit supporting PIL challenging ban on women’s entry . In January 11 , 2016 , the Two – judge bench of Supreme Court questions practice banning entry of women at the temple . In 2016, at the apex court, a division bench of two judges on January 11 raised the question over the restriction of female devotees inside the temple. The then UDF (United Democratic Front) government led by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy informed the apex court that it is bound to “protect the right to practice the religion of these devotees.” The Supreme Court argued gender Justice endangered by a ban on women .and sated that tradition cannot rationalize a ban on women’s entry. The Hindu Navothana pratistan and

Narayansharma Tapovanam filed plea in Supreme Court supporting entry of women in April 21, 2016 (Indian Express , April 24, 2016). The UDF also supported the entry of women of all age groups . In October 13 , 2017 , the Supreme Court referred the case to constitution bench . In July 25, 2018 , the Nair Service Society argued Supreme Court the celibate nature of Sabarimala temple's presiding deity Lord Ayyappa is protecting by the constitution and the Supreme Court observed that it can't remain oblivious to ban on entry of women as they were barred on " physiological ground " of menstruation. In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional scheme prohibiting exclusion has "some values in a "vibrant democracy". The apex court by a majority verdict of 4:1, on September 28, 2018, removed the restriction preventing women and girls from entering the famous Ayyappa shrine (Indian Express, September 28, 2018). The age-old Hindu worship was ruled unlawful and unconstitutional by the judiciary.

In September 26, 2018 the Indian Supreme Court endorsed that entry to the Sabarimala shrine is open to everyone of any age. The five – judge constitution bench headed by them C J Dipak Misra with justice R F Nariman, A M Khanolkar , D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra pronounced the verdict, with Indu Malhotra dissenting . A law prohibiting women and girls between the ages of 10 and 50 from accessing the Sabarimala temple in Kerala has been overturned by the Supreme Court. Chief justice Dipak Misra - chaired constitution bench in a 4 – 1 verdict remarked the temple rule infringed upon their rights to gender parity and worship. The only dissent voice came from the lone women judge on the bench, justice Indu Malhotra that "we have no hesitation in saying that such an exclusionary practice violates the right of women to visit and enter a temple to freely practice Hindu religion and to express her faith towards lord Ayyappa" (SC 2018, p. 43).

Justice D Y Chandrachud characterized customs as a form of 'Untouchability,' asserting that "such practices are impermissible under the constitution. While Article 17 is undoubtedly applicable to untouchability practices concerning lower castes, it also extends to the systematic dishonour, marginalization, and suppression experienced by women. The societal

marginalization of women due to menstruation constitutes a form of untouchability that goes against constitutional principles. Preventing women from entering the Sabarimala temple is not a fundamental religious practice. The court should refrain from endorsing constitutional validity for practices that undermine the dignity of women and their right to equal citizenship” (SC 2018, p. 24).

Ideas of cleanliness and pollution that stigmatize individuals have no relevance in a constitutional framework. Justice Malhotra advocated for allowing faith to remain irrational if necessary. She felt that, “In a secular society, courts typically refrain from intervening in issues that involve profound religious beliefs and sentiments” (SC 2018, p. 25). The majority dismissed all the contentions put forth by the temple board opposing the entry of women of all ages. This encompassed the disagreement that the practice was ancient and an indispensable facet of the Hindu religion, as well as the assertion that followers of Ayyappa constituted a distinct denomination (The Hindu, October, 18, 2018). Conversely, the bench asserted that permitting Hindu women to enter a temple as followers is an integral aspect of the Hindu religion. The Apex Court has approved permission for women of all age groups to enter the temple, deeming the customary practice of barring women a violation of Article 25 and Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Worship. Following the verdict, there were numerous disputes between protestors and the police, with many male devotees opposing the entry of women into the temple in defiance of the court's order.

The Board, which also comprise the state government nominees, told a five – judge constitution Bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi that “it is high time that a particular class not be discriminated on the ground of biological attributes” (The Indian Express, September 28, 2018). The Sabarimala review bench had referred to a range of questions to a seven-judge constitution bench to settle the legal debate on the scope of freedom of religion. In forwarding the issue to a broader bench, the five-judge panel emphasized that the discussion on the constitutional legitimacy of religious practices, such as prohibiting the entry of women and girls into places of worship, extended beyond the Sabarimala case. The bench observed that similar limitations were present in cases involving

the entry of Muslim women into mosques and 'dargahs,' as well as Parsi women, married to non-Parsi men, being prohibited from accessing the sacred fireplace in an Agiary (India Today, January 13, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Religion has been a very strong tool of patriarchy to oppress women. The debate on the condition of women in religion can be traced back to the time of its evolution. Article 18 of the UDHR declares “every individual possesses an equal entitlement to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (United Nations, 1948); however to achieve full gender equality in meaningful and authentic sagacity, equality under the law is simply not sufficient. The historically ontologically inferior position of women, social roles & cultural & traditional context must be taken into account. Kerala women have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal position in the minds of men. The subjugation of women based on biological factors is a form of untouchability, is abhorrence to constitutional values. The Apex Court declared that the fundamental right of freedom to practice religion is guaranteed to “all persons” by the Constitution and the women have the right to enter and pray like men at the famous Sabrimala temple in Kerala. It is a constitutional right. Exclusion of particular age group of women forces women to disclose their menstruation stage and it violates their privacy. But here, gender stereotyping and blind religious beliefs violates constitutional morality. There is need to stop such discriminations particularly in case of women to prevent them from exploitation and inferior treatment. Faiths and traditions of devotees cannot be changed through a judicial process. Until societal change occurs internally, we can anticipate ongoing instances of religious matters being brought before the courts. Advancing gender equality and equity is a collective effort that should be championed by both women and men to ensure sustainable socio-economic development.

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## Silent Scars and Invisible Wounds: Physical Changes in Women Survivors of War Trauma

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### Abstract

*War produces a path of ruin that goes well beyond the actual battlefield. Survivors of sexual assault bear psychological and emotional scars, which are among its most terrible repercussions. Women, in particular, are frequently targeted as victims of rape and sexual assault during wartime, suffering unspeakable atrocities with lasting consequences. This article dives into the experiences of rape victims affected by war, evaluating the enormous influence on their physical and mental health, social ties, and capacity to rebuild their lives following such tragedy.*

**Keywords: War Trauma, War Victims, Physical Health, Social Stigma, Cannon Bard Theory of Emotions**

### Discussion

Women frequently experience war and conflict differently than males because of their gender roles, social position, and cultural standards. Studying their experiences leads to a more thorough understanding of the effects of conflict. Women's experiences during conflict are frequently disregarded or marginalized in historical accounts. Researching their pain offers voice to individuals who have been silenced or marginalized. Understanding women's war trauma can assist governments and relief organizations in developing more successful methods for meeting the unique requirements of female survivors, such as access to healthcare, psycho-social support, and legal protection. By researching women's war experiences, we may challenge assumptions about their roles as passive victims and recognize their agency, resilience,

and contributions to peace-building and post-conflict rebuilding.

Research on women's war trauma can help to larger conversations about gender equality by emphasizing the significance of tackling gender-based violence and discrimination in conflict and post-conflict contexts. War has historically been viewed as a male-dominated domain, with narratives frequently focusing on the experiences of male soldiers. However, the impact of war on women, especially in the context of trauma, is frequently underestimated. Women have distinct experiences with combat, both as active participants and as citizens caught in the crossfire. Trauma has a dimensional impact on their physical, psychological, and social well-being. Through the perspective of literature, one may investigate these experiences and acquire a better understanding of women's resilience and survival in the face of war trauma.

One of the key components of women's war trauma experiences is their position as caretakers or nurses and nurturers. In many societies, women are required to keep families together during times of strife, often at tremendous personal cost. This is eloquently shown in Khaled Hosseini's novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns," in which the protagonist, Mariam, navigates the complexity of the Afghan conflict. Mariam's life has been marred by loss and struggle since she was forced into marriage at such a young age. Despite this, she finds strength in her job as mother and caretaker, showcasing women's perseverance in the face of hardship (Hosseini, 2007, p.43).

Another essential part of women's war trauma is how it affects their mental health. The horrors of war may leave deep psychological scars, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and despair. In Kevin Powers' "The Yellow Birds," the character Murph muses on the emotional toll of war, saying, "I'm afraid of my own mind"(Kevin, 2012, p.97). This attitude is shared by many women who have suffered combat trauma, demonstrating the tremendous impact it may have on mental health.

Despite the severe effects of war trauma on women, their perseverance and survival demonstrate the tenacity of the human spirit. Through literature, we may acquire insight into women's wartime experiences and honour their stories of fortitude and survival.

By elevating these tales, we may contribute to a more inclusive understanding of war trauma and facilitate the healing and recovery of conflict-affected women.

Furthermore, women frequently experience particular types of trauma during conflict, such as sexual abuse and exploitation. Lawrence Hill's novel "The Book of Negroes", depicts this effectively, with the protagonist, Aminata Diallo, experiencing the cruelty of enslavement and war. Despite enduring horrific pain, Aminata stays resilient, demonstrating the power and perseverance of women in the face of unimaginable trauma (Hill, 2007, p.144).

Throughout history, the devastating impacts of war have often been measured in terms of casualties, destruction, and geopolitical ramification. However, one aspect that often remains overlooked is the plight of female victims of war. While men predominantly fill the roles of soldiers and combatants, women often bear the brunt of conflict in different, yet equally profound ways. The article explores the multifaceted dimensions of female victim-hood in times of war. In times of conflict, women are often subjected to physical violence and sexual assault, either as deliberate acts of war or as a consequence of the breakdown of societal norms and structures. One notable literary depiction of this phenomenon is found in Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale", where women are systematically oppressed and used as reproductive vessels in the dystopian society built on the remnants of a war-torn world (Atwood, 1985, p.57). While on the other hand, war also results in mass displacement, with women and children comprising a significant proportion of refugees and internally displaced persons. The novel "The Knight Runner" vividly portrays the experiences of Afghan women forced to flee their homes amidst the turmoil of conflict, grappling with loss, uncertainty, and harsh realities of displacement (Hosseini, 2013, p.5).

The psychological toll of war on women is profound, encompassing experiences of grief, fear, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder. "The Round House" delves into the psychological aftermath of violence against Native American women, exploring themes of trauma, resilience, and healing within the context of historical and contemporary conflicts (Erdrich, 2012, p.14). War disrupts the social fabric of communities, leading to the erosion of familial structures, traditional roles, and support

networks. The novel “Half of a Yellow Sun” provides an insight into the impact of war on Nigerian women during the civil conflict, highlighting the resilience and resourcefulness of women in the face of adversity (Adichie, 2006, p.220). The experiences of female victims of war are diverse and complex, encompassing physical, psychological, and socio-economic dimensions. By examining both historical accounts and literary representations, one can get a deeper understanding of the myriad ways in which women are affected by war or conflict. It is imperative that their voices be heard, their suffering acknowledged, and their rights upheld in the pursuit of peace and justice.

Rape in the context of war causes tremendous physical and psychological suffering for its victims. Physically, survivors may experience bruises, sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancies, and long-term reproductive health difficulties. Furthermore, the psychological consequences are frequently severe, resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, and a variety of other mental health issues. Rape trauma can also emerge as somatic symptoms including persistent pain, migraines, and gastrointestinal difficulties, compounding survivors’ suffering.

### **Social and Cultural Stigmas**

In addition to physical and psychological obstacles, rape survivors confront social and cultural shame, which can exacerbate their pain. In many cultures, the shame and stigma associated with rape can result in social isolation, rejection by family members, and even honour murders. Survivors are sometimes blamed for the violence inflicted against them, exacerbating their feelings of loneliness and despair. This social stigma can also limit survivors’ access to support services, as they may fear being judged or punished if they speak out about their experiences. Sometimes the victims who survive rape but did not survive it’s social recurrence. There are many organizations and committee for the welfare of women victims, one those founder of non-governmental women’s refugee route, who stated that stigma prevented many survivors from reporting abuse and seeking justice. (Jaf, 2017)

## **Challenges in Seeking Justice and Redress**

The quest of justice for survivors of wartime sexual assault presents several hurdles. Legal institutions in conflict-affected nations are frequently ineffective or inefficient, making it difficult for survivors to seek restitution via legal means. The book “Justice for Victims before the International Criminal Court” draws challenges faced by victims including women, in accessing justice before the international criminal court (Moffett, 2014, p.87). Many social activists trying to seek justice and redress for war related violence, one among those are “Feminism and War” (Riley, 2009). Furthermore, the prevalent culture of impunity surrounding sexual assault in war ensures that offenders are rarely held accountable for their actions. This impunity not only denies survivors the justice they deserve, but it also feeds the cycle of violence by providing the message that such acts will go unpunished.

### **Unveiling the Physical Changes due to War Trauma: A Study on War Memoir “When Heaven and Earth Changed the Places”**

War literature or trauma studies frequently investigate the complex relationship between mental and physical health. War plays a vital role in the individual’s life, as they carry the mental trauma throughout their life. The incidents associated with war make the individual develop stress. Physiological changes show how emotional discomfort may have physical consequences, and vice versa. When examining the physiological or physical changes, the vital element is to examine the cause of the changes. The individual’s cause of change is an emotional state of mind. The memoir, **“When Heaven and Earth Changed Places”** published in 1989, provides an insight on the life of Le Ly Hayslip. She served as a Viet Cong, a servant, a black marketer, a teenage single mother and above all she is a survivor. Hayslip, mainly known as a Viet-Cong dwells into an emotional act of fear when her village is under American trope. As a rape victim, she fears for her movements.

Hayslip's memoir depicts the physical toll of war, with descriptions of damage, bloodshed, and loss. Hayslip and others around her suffer starvation, disease, injury, and death as a result of the brutalities of war and the hardships of living as refugees. These physical sufferings not only influence their current circumstances, but also have long-term consequences, such as chronic health disorders, impairments, and scars that act as permanent reminders of the trauma they have experienced.

Rape and war are both incredibly stressful occurrences that may have deep and complicated repercussions on a person's physiological and psychological well-being. Hayslip's village has been interrogated to find out what really happened and importantly to know the whereabouts of Viet Cong and during the interrogation Hayslip and her family members somehow escaped. "That night, I slept with my mother while my father and brother Sau Ban and several Republican soldiers slept by the door. I had a terrible dream of ghosts floating through the village and into our house and into my mouth and nose and I couldn't breathe" (Hayslip, 1989, p.38). The sleeps are not considered to a peaceful one after the attacks of American troops. Due to the fear, Hayslip finds difficult to breathe during her sleep. The fear is a perceived emotion which is experienced and accompanied by a range of bodily or physical response or changes. The response can include hardness in breathing. According to Cannon Bard, the felt emotions and the bodily reactions are independent of each other, but triggered simultaneously (Morgan, 1986, p.330). Hayslip encounters the emotion fear during her sleep and as a result of the fear, she experience the hardness in breathing. Throughout the memoir, Hayslip eloquently portrays her emotional reactions to numerous occurrences. She depicts, for example, the terror and bewilderment she felt during bombs and assaults, the loss and heartbreak she felt after losing loved ones, and the bittersweet emotions she had after fleeing her hometown. According to the Cannon-Bard's hypothesis, these emotional experiences were accompanied by "physiological reactions" (Morgan, 1986, p.330). Hayslip, for instance, may have had elevated heart rate, sweaty hands, and heightened perceptions during extreme times of dread. According to the theoretical perspective, the emotional experiences and physiological reactions are distinct processes. Hayslip may have had high emotions while also

suffering physiological changes in her situation. These responses happened concurrently but were not interdependent. Thus, giving a vision on independence of emotion and physiology. In a bombing occurrence, Hayslip clearly recalls her terror during the attacks. She talks of the deafening roar, the trembling earth, and her pulse thumping in her chest.

The research article focuses on the significant psychological transformations that occur when people return and remember their memories, with the goal of unravelling the rich tapestry of metamorphosis that develops from the act of memory recall. Warfare transcends beyond its immediate temporal and geographical boundaries, becoming a pervasive force that pervades the fundamental fabric of individual consciousness. War trauma, both explicit and implicit, intertwines with memory, influencing the narratives that people carry with them. The investigation of psychological alterations caused by memory recollection is a moving endeavor that recognizes the persistent nature of war's influence on the human psyche. The psychological upheavals that individuals experience as a result of conflict are as deep. Hayslip eloquently depicts the psychological effects of living in a combat zone, where dread, sadness, and trauma are frequent companions. The atrocities of battle leave lasting emotional scars, resulting in PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. Furthermore, the loss of loved ones, the ruin of communities, and the disruption of regular life all contribute to feelings of dislocation and alienation that can last long after the physical wounds have healed.

“The next morning, as we buried the two victims, the Republican troops returned. This time they came into our houses and searched for evidence that might link us to the enemy (Hayslip, 1989, p.38). In her neighborhood, they find two dead bodies. They are Viet Cong and are victimized. The North Vietnamese soldiers should not encounter them. Thus, Hayslip's family is very conscious of this news. Hayslip's family will be in trouble if they learn about the dead Viet Cong. “We were too tired to drink – too exhausted even for sleep” (Hayslip, 1989, p.68). After being afraid of losing her brother, all her family members were worried. They are very tired of crying and even sick of

sleeping. Due to their inner pain (silent pain), they lose their sleep. Indeed, they lost their energy to fear.

From a literature point of view, Hayslip's memoir is considered to be the voice of victims and an eye-opener for Vietnamese literature, too, as Ludwig Wittgenstein stated that "what we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence"(Nguyen, 2016, p.205). Hayslip's memoir changes this statement. She voiced every aspect of War and what War turned out like from a victim's perspective. The urge for self-determination comes from deep within oneself or embedded inside the individual for survival. Hayslip ignites the willpower to survive to take care of her family. She wants to take care of her son does not belong to the same nationality. During her childhood, her family panicked due to their brothers' service in the combat zone. If the North Vietnam soldiers find out their family is against their government's rule, they will face the consequences. "And panic is the enemy of survival. If nothing else, wars make you appreciate what's important" (Hayslip, 1989, p.102). The feeling of the enemy comes within themselves. This sense of fear makes Hayslip change her behavior in all aspects. When substantiating the point with the theoretical front-line, minute things must matter a lot in behavioral change. To do justice to both the beauty of peace and the self during the War is difficult at the level of self. One can also witness the "passive-aggressive element" (Nguyen, 2016, p.205) hiding inside.

The element of torture brings out the aspects within which are unexplained. Hayslip once worked as a Viet Cong and was imprisoned for working. There she undergoes torture to the core. Not only Hayslip but many other girls worked as Viet Cong. They are captured and tortured for several days. They are even raped, and some girls die due to rape. Hayslip undergoes much torture, and she decides to experience them. Lately, she is a girl who does not mind listening to her mother and is not ready to sacrifice her life. Nevertheless, after undergoing the element of torture, she changes her behavior. War is the central aspect that creates a lot of painful elements, and thus those elements



are considered the external force terms to be the primary cause of behavioral change. Her first level of torture is physical torture, where her arms get twisted, and her fingers get jammed. The soldiers give several punishments to make them sick and die.

Despite all the tortures, Hayslip prays only for her survival as she wants to look at her family. All her misery, pain, and anger have become an experience to handle all the complex situations in life, especially during the War. The second level of torture is making the girls stand nude, as they have honey on them to put the ants on to bite them. Ant bites on the whole body are a hell of a pain. Some girls, due to the horrible pain, start to scream. "The scream," in the words of Hayslip, was the sound of anger, pain, and fear. In the *Woman Warrior* (Nguyen, 2016, p.195), Hayslip is considered a woman warrior. There was no pain on her face when the ants were on her whole body. She slowly watched her self-destruction; here, the destruction is her behavior. Due to these kinds of tortures, she changes into a new person who considers peace the only solution for all the pain in the world. From this, one can also understand that Southeast Asians believed in Buddhism. Perhaps the ideology of Buddhism is peace. During her childhood, Hayslip's father taught her about the philosophy of Buddhism. Hayslip believes in her father and his words. She follows those aspects whenever she is in trouble. One can gradually see the changes from her childhood, teenage, and adulthood stage. Slowly her view on the war changes, and she gains experience.

War also causes substantial behavioural changes in individuals as they adjust to a hostile and chaotic environment. Hayslip's narrative is full with examples of how wartime demands alter people's behaviour, ranging from acts of exceptional heroism and endurance to instances of despair and brutality. The necessity to negotiate a world of violence and uncertainty causes people to make decisions they never would have anticipated, resulting in moral quandaries and ethical compromises that plague them long after the conflict is ended.

"There – I'm doing it again: Letting my imagination run wild! I thought I'd gotten over that in Saigon, but I guess not! Shame on you, Le Ly! Shame, shame, shame!" (Hayslip, 1989, p.193). Her first rape, and she is the first rape victim in her family, confined her,

and she feels ashamed due to the rape. Later she starts to talk to herself, and the guilt makes her hate herself. Rape is a shame, rape is dirty, and rape is a sin in Hayslip's perspective. The mistake is not hers'; perhaps she blames herself. She possesses some heavy burden to bear the pain of rape. Lately, she realized the actual pain and used it as a tool to expose her feeling towards society. War brings out many different things and exposes different people, not solely the soldiers. Providing a crystal picture of the combat zone is a real struggle. The research examines how War caused rape and how rape molded an individual. Thus, in the case of Hayslip, the sudden change due to War is purely positive, suppressing her pain. Both war and rape are the external driving force that impacted Hayslip's life, and she changed her behavior in such a way.

The narration in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, marks a point that it is merely like time travel; Hayslip slips from past to present and present to past. "After they left, I waited a few minutes, then followed what I presumed was my father's path to the song Hang River ferry and the bus that would take him to Ba's house and then to marble mountain" (Hayslip, 1989, p.180). When Hayslip is done with all her work, she settles her son with all good fortune and returns to her native place for a visit; from there, she starts her narration at first, and she introduces her father, who is a man of philosophy. She loves her father and follows his words. Furthermore, he is the primary reason for her forgiveness nature. Whenever she thinks of her father, she recalls her action and words for her. When Hayslip was pregnant with Ann's child, her family member abandoned her, and she was thrown out of her sister's place. During that time, she makes herself strong with her father's words. "Dhanag where I had been accosted by youths and nearly raped in 1966" (Hayslip, 1989, p.318). During his flight time, she recalls the incident of rape and torture which she encountered during the War. That one flight made her remember all her bitter past. Perhaps she holds it and leaves it positively.

### **Memory as a Triggering Tool**

Memory, that mysterious storehouse of events, performs a significant role in the aftermath of war. Memory becomes a disputed territory for individuals who have been

through the furnace of battle, where the past is relived, remade, and occasionally reconstructed. Memory recollection plays a significant role in forming an individual's post-war narrative and sense of identity. The complex interplay between memory and psychological well-being highlights the need to investigate the subtle ways in which remembering forms individual identities and narratives. The research article intends to shed light on the psychological transformation that occurs when persons touched by conflict reflect on their experiences.

Despite the enormous problems they confront, many rape survivors show extraordinary perseverance and fortitude in reconstructing their lives and communities. Counselling, medical treatment, and economic empowerment programme are all examples of supportive interventions that may help survivors heal from trauma and reclaim a feeling of agency and dignity. Furthermore, efforts to address the underlying causes of sexual violence in war, such as gender inequality and impunity, are critical for averting future atrocities and ensuring long-term peace and stability.

The experiences of rape victims affected by combat highlight the critical need for comprehensive and coordinated efforts to address the complicated issues they encounter. This involves ensuring survivors have access to appropriate healthcare, emotional support, legal help, and economic prospects. It also necessitates tackling the underlying causes of sexual assault in war, such as gender inequality and the culture of impunity. By acknowledging rape survivors' specific needs and rights, we may strive towards a future in which such crimes are not only denounced but also prevented, guaranteeing that all people can live without fear of sexual assault.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the physical alterations seen by women survivors of war trauma are not superficial; they are substantial modifications that reflect the long-term impact of combat. These silent scars and unseen wounds testify to the unspeakable pain faced by women in combat zones. Despite the difficulties they confront, these survivors show incredible strength and courage as they traverse the complexity of healing and

rehabilitation. It is critical that we recognize and treat these physical changes in order to offer these women with the care and support they need, as well as to guarantee that their voices and experiences are heard. Only then will we be able to really comprehend the full scope of war's human cost and fight towards a future in which such misery is no longer possible.

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## Changing Dynamics of Goan Identity

Prachi Naik

### Abstract

*The Goan identity is constantly in flux. The paper identifies three important dynamics influencing the evolution of Goan identity since liberation. The dynamics based on monolingualism shaped traditional Goan identity in post-colonial Goa. The paper highlights the fissures created by the multilingual history of Goa that formulate the Goan identity in monolingual framework. The inauguration of neo-liberal policies in India with the onset of globalisation in 90s has swapped the linguistic bases of defining Goan identity with a land-based identity. The regional identity of being a Goan clubbed with environmental activism has shaped the Goan identity after globalisation. The category of 'non-Goan' galvanised Goan identity. The paper explains the transformation of 'non-Goans' into the 'neo-Goans' as a result of the amalgamation of feudal, real-estate interest and the interests of the state. The paper examines the subaltern engagement with the Goan identity.*

Keyword: Language, Goan Identity, Subaltern, Land, Lusophone, Tourism, Globalisation

### Introduction

Goa is treated as 'unique space' due to its Portuguese background in academics. The ponderings in popular gatherings and academic discussions on 'Goan identity' generally begins with an anecdote of Jawaharlal Nehru's description about Goan people as '*Ajeeb hai ye Goa ke log*'. Rochelle Pinto (2007) describes the uniqueness of Goa by contextualizing its place as situated 'between the two empires' i.e. the Portuguese and the British empire. This geo-political location of Goa in history has produced a debate between the two ideas of Goa; as '*Goa Dourada*' and '*Goa Indica*'. The former locates Goa under *Lusophone* identity whereas later connects its cultural origine to India. Though the scholars have attempted to challenge the employment of these two frames in analysing Goan identity, the academic debates on Goan identity oscillate between these two frames (Trichur 2000; de Souza 2000). The emphasis on *Goa Dourada* and *Goa Indica* frameworks have been used to argue for the peculiar case of Goan orientalism (Fernandes 2014). Such attempts radicalise one frame over the other. These radical binaries add to their complexities and further cause to change its composition.

Anant Kakba Priolkar (1983) highlights the complexities involved in defining the Goan identity by pondering upon the question of 'Who is Goan?' He highlights the constraints in defining Goan identity by evaluating historical data and comes up with a flexible definition of 'Goan' as 'anyone whose forefathers have been domiciled in Goa at any time in history and one who is aware about this connection, can be called as Goan' (Priolkar 1983, 270). Priolkar's flexibility in defining Goan stems from his caste location as Hindu upper caste as he narrates his meeting with Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar, having established in Poona did not fail to trace his origin to Goa by tracing link to the family deity '*Shantadurga*' located in a village in Goa (Priolkar 1983, 270). Priolkar was astonished by the attachment shown by Bhandarkar in rekindling the family tradition of worshiping the deity, as at the time, Bhandarkar has shown uncompromising advocacy towards the renouncement of the idol worship (Priolkar 1983, 270). Therefore, it is unsure whether the same flexibility in appropriating the Goan identity is available with a lower caste individual who may not have anything i.e. neither association with family deity, nor surnames of Goan village, to prove his belonging to Goa. Thus, the regional identities seem absurd as it privileges the powerful and marginalises the weak, but since the regional location in democratic polity of India emerged as a legitimised location of social justice, it is important to scrutinize the same. Pramod Kale (1994) describes the complexities involved in defining contemporary Goan identity through the 'paradise lost' syndrome characterised by the loss of communal harmony between the Hindus and Christians. Kale argues that being Goan is perceived in opposition to being an Indian, in which the perception about Indians is framed through the experiences of Indian tourist whom Goans perceive as 'cheap and messy' (Kale 1994, 911). Thus, he points out stigmatisation of Indian identity in Goa as opposed to Goan identity.

The linguistic assertion simplified the complexities of defining regional identity in post-independent India. In post-colonial Goa, the elites attempted to encapsulate the intricacies of Goan identity through a monolingual framework represented in the form of Konkani language. In contemporary political discourse, Goa is imagined as a Konkani land. The imagination of Goan identity in monolingual framework is contrary to its multilingual history. The following section discusses the counter currents of defining Goan identity in linguistic framework.

### **The linguistic assertion of Goan Identity**

The traditional Goan identity is constructed through Konkani language. Jason Fernandes (2014) analyses the process of the formation of Goan identity through the Konkani language. Though Fernandes critique the construction of Konkani identity as stemming from the cultural superiority of Hindu upper caste

reflected in legitimizing the Nagari script as the authentic script for Konkani, it fails to capture the making of Goan identity from multilingual framework. Similarly, Narayan Desai (2002) unfolds the events in legitimizing the Nagari script as the legitimate script for Konkani but fails to capture the construction of Konkani as a symbol of Goan identity. Making of Konkani as a symbol of Goan identity is often juxtaposed with Marathi. Konkani and Marathi languages in contemporary Goa are seen in binaries and Konkani is stressed upon as a mark of the Goan identity as opposite to Marathi identity (Sardessai 2006; Pereira 1971). The projection of Goa and Goans as Konkani speaking territory hides the peculiarities associated with the Portuguese rule in Goa. The peculiarities of Portuguese rule impromptu produced multilingualism in Goa. Konkani along with Marathi, Portuguese, and English have played a key role in defining the Goan identity.

The peculiarities of Portuguese rule lie in the stages of Portuguese annexation of Goa. Portuguese first captured an island known as *Tiswadi* in 1510 followed by *Bardez* and *Salcete* in 1543. These three territories captured in sixteenth century are known as 'old conquest'. Technically Portuguese ruled only the areas of old conquests for four centuries. The Lusophone influences on Goan identity lie in these areas of Old Conquest. The remaining part of Goa, Portuguese captured in late 18<sup>th</sup> century which included Ponda, Sanguem, Quepem and Canacona in 1763-64, Bicholim, Sattari in 1781 and Pernem in 1788. These areas are known as 'new conquest'. Marathi dominated the social sphere in new conquest. The genesis of 'Goa Dourada' and 'Goa Indica' narratives about the Goan identity lies in the division of the territory into the old and new conquest respectively. The old conquest is primarily Christian dominated areas while the new conquests are Hindu dominated territories. In 20<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of press, Konkani press remained limited to the areas of old conquest while Marathi press dominated the new conquest.

Portuguese, being the language of the Imperial power, remained a dominant language in Goa in both Old and New Conquests until the liberation. Similarly, the economic urgency brought the people of Goa, primarily from the old conquests, into contact with the English language. The local discourse in periodicals in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discusses the mobility provided by the English language due to the grim economic situation in Goa (Raposo, 2008, p. 188). Portuguese opened the first state-run English language school in Goa as early as 1869 (Pinto, 2007, p. 98). Thus, despite Goa being a Portuguese controlled area, English shaped the local discourse in Goa as early as 19<sup>th</sup> century. English language provided a mobility to the lower caste Catholics from old conquests. Many of them took up education in English and left Goa to seek employment in Bombay and elsewhere in British India. This has enabled the lower caste and class Catholics to contest their marginalised identity and overcame the boundaries of caste. Caste remained a horrifying reality to even Goan Catholics as conversion did not



change their caste location. However, mobility provided by the English provided them with an opportunity to make the caste identity redundant. This is reflected in the form of discussion taking place in Konkani periodicals in colonial Goa. The marginality of Goan Catholics in old conquests were contested not through caste but through a class-based category of '*Durbol*' (D'Souza, 1930; Amcho Gao, 1932; Amcho Gao, 1932). Many lower caste Goan migrants in Bombay in British India could escape the clutches of castes through the profit they earned in their business. Thus, English shaped the Goan identity in empowering manner in old conquest.

The multilingual past of Goa gets personified in present times whenever the threat to the multilingualism appears. In 1990, when the Congress government announced the suspension of grants to the English medium schools, people protested on ground forcing government to stall its decision. The support to English in Goa has much more than economic basis. In a way, it has become a part of identity of a section of Goans owing to its empowering role in history and also in present. The opposition to English stems from the danger to the traditional culture embodied in vernacular languages. In 2011, Konkani and Marathi supporters protested against the decision of Congress government led by Chief Minister Digambar Kamat's announcement of the grants to the English medium schools. To oppose the alliance of Konkani-Marathi supporters, a Forum of Rights of Children to Education (FORCE) was launched. Such initiatives by civil society reflect the deep entrenched multilingual landscape of Goa.

An attempt to make the Konkani as official language of Goa met with an opposition from the Marathi supporters. *Marathi Rajbhasha Prasthapan Samiti* is an organisation fighting for the official status for Marathi in Goa. This organisation doesn't belong to Maharashtra but has roots in Goa due to the historical roots of Marathi in new conquests. Therefore, the incorporation of Marathi and English in the Official Language Act adhered to the multilingualism of Goan society. These three languages together shape Goan identity.

The contestation over linguistic framework is at the heart of the formation of Goan identity. The projection of Konkani as the symbol of Goan identity has undergone linguistic claims and counter-claims. The genesis of this debate goes back to its history. The downtrodden sections from old conquests expressed Goaness through the Konkani written in Roman script. The employment of Roman script by the church provided a fillip to the projection of Goan identity. The role of Marathi in preserving the sanctity of Hindu religion in new conquests provided a firm bases for Marathi in new conquests areas. Marathi also provided a voice for the lower castes Hindus in challenging the caste oppression. The lower castes belonging to artist community challenged the exploitation of Devadasis through the Marathi periodical '*Pragati*'. The Hindu

assertion in Konkani entered through the Vaman Valaulikar known as the modern revivor of Konkani movement. Goan identity in the works of Valaulikar emerges in the form of Konkani assertions built on the narrative of the antithesis to Marathi (Varde Valaulikar 2003). The Konkani movement built on the basis of anti-Marathi sentiments found sympathizers during the demand for making Konkani as the official language of the state. During the anti-merger agitation, Goa's history as the Portuguese colony dominated the public discourse in favour of retaining the status of Goa as a union territory. At the time of the official language agitation, Konkani language formed the text of Goan identity, and the unique status of Goa as a Portuguese colony formed its sub-text. Thus, the traditional Goan identity came to be defined in linguistic framework. The passing of official language act legitimizing the use of Nagari as the authentic script for Konkani language created the fissures in monolingual definition of Goan identity. The migration of Catholic community in gulf and Europe has spread the linguistic assertion abroad. The Konkani in Roman script plays a key role in defining and sustaining the Goan identity among the overseas Catholic population. The emergence of globalization challenged the linguistic framework of Goan identity. The neo-liberal policies replaced the linguistic framework of influencing the Goan identity. The response to the neo-liberal policies have changed over the period of time. From its denial to co-option since 90s, neoliberalism added multiple layers to the composition of Goan identity. The following section traces the transformation of Goan identity from 'non-Goans' to the 'neo-Goans' in the wake of neo-liberal policies.

### **Neo-liberalism and Goan identity**

In the initial decades of Goa's liberation, the arrival of hippies largely transformed Goa's image as 'Europe of India'. The neo-liberalism sought to exploit the image of Goa as an international tourism destination leading to the introduction of several land conversion projects for industrial and tourism purposes. The Goan identity further channelised to preserve the demographic composition of Goa which was seen at a threat as a result of the influx of migrants from neighbouring states. The threat to environmental landscape in the form of Konkan Railway Project and Nylon 6'6 aggravated concerns around Goan Identity. The environmental movement of 90s were basically feudal movements initiated to protect the land belonging to Bhatcars (feudal). The regional identity of being a Goan clubbed with environmental activism has shaped the Goan identity at the onset of globalisation. The neo-liberalism primarily concentrated on the control of land. The unchecked tourism is seen as a threat to the Goan identity and culture (Noronha 1997). The tourism policy is critiqued for promoting the commodification of Goa as a space of consumption (Routledge 2000). This policy fostered the real estate interests in land conversion challenging the existing feudal

structure. The Goan identity during the liberalisation phase moulded through the contestation between the state-business nexus, and feudal over the control of land.

The Goa Bachao Abhiyan launched in 2006 is an important movement channelising the Goan identity through the contestation over the land. The movement was backed by the civil society comprising of professionals such as Professors, Writers, Lawyers, Doctors, Journalist, etc. The movement opposed the 'Regional Plan 2011'. The plan was accused for seeking the land conversion through rapid development of urban centres (EPW 2006, 5205). The unaccountability and impartiality in planning process was one of the main reasons for opposing the regional planning process (Da Silva, Nielsen and Bedi 2020). The protestors against the regional plan came from upper caste and class backgrounds. The Goan identity galvanised through the construction of 'non-Goans' category. The 'non-Goans' were the real estate lobby from the other states and also foreign nationals. In fact, the foreign nationals particularly hippies were welcomed in Goa in pre-liberalisation period. Many hippies have settled in the village known as Anjuna in North Goa (Saldanha 2009, 70). The liberalisation marked the entry of other foreign nationals which includes Israelis, Russians, Britons, Africans, etc. The entry of these foreign nationals and their engagement into drug cartels and other illegal businesses created an 'anti-foreign national' attitude among the Goans (Chari 2013) (Times News Network 2011). Along with Indians, these foreign nationals are categorised as 'non-Goans' seeking to possess land ownership in Goa.

Goa provides an access to the amenities of urban life in a picturesque village environment. This unique synthesis of city and village attracts the claimants for Goan identity from the metropolitan locations of India. The rich Indian class wants to make Goa as their abode. The desire to own a home in Goa has transformed Goa from 'holiday destination' to a 'second home destination' (Faizan 2023). The rise in private investment in building 'second home' in Goa is a testimony to the shift in market strategy from making Goa a tourism destination to a permanent residence. The rich class especially from the Delhi-NCR region are investing in properties located in Goa (Faizan 2023). This class has invested in all kinds of tourism related businesses including night clubs, pubs, restaurants, shacks, villas providing an access to second homes, and all other plethora of tourism related businesses. The prospects of luxury lifestyle in Goa attracts these classes to permanently settle here. From initial unwelcome to accepting the cream from the parts of India to Goa, have given rise to the new category of 'neo-Goans' in public discourse (Kamat 2024). They are the newly settled population in Goa from different parts of India claiming the Goan identity. The ownership over the land defines the new category of 'neo-Goans'. The amalgamation of the interests of feudal with the real estate business interests has transformed the once identified 'non-Goans' into the 'neo-

Goans' identity. Therefore, the state once known for staging a civil protest against the commercialisation of land has not seen any big movement on the lines of Goa Bachao Abhiyan in the recent times. The real estate lobby has been vociferously campaigning for the land conversion in the form of aggressive advertisements. For instance, in Bicholim- Goa, the advertisement hoardings installed by a private real-estate firm with a caption 'Delhi capture Goa' goes unnoticed as a mainstream media are now reluctant to address such issues. This indicates the alliance between elites comprises of state, feudal, and real-estate lobbies in land conversion. In this context, the Subaltern Goan's engagement with issues of Goan identity deserves attention.

### **Subaltern Goan Identity**

The category of Subaltern Goans comprises of lower caste-class Christians and Hindus. The subaltern Goan in the earlier phases of Goa's liberation contested the monolingual projection of Goan identity by emphasizing upon the multilingual character of Goa. They invoked assertion of English and Marathi, and Konkani written in Roman script. The leadership of Dayanand Bandodkar, the first chief minister of Goa, consolidated the lower castes under the loose conglomeration of Bahujan identity. However, the subaltern Goan groups remain divided into various sections and have employed Goan identity differently. For instance, one of the earliest manifestations of Subaltern Goan identity employed by some groups within the subaltern includes the identity of 'Original Goan' or 'Original settler' to the land, referred in Konkani as '*mul genkar*'. It is important to note that the groups referred as tribes of Goa in contemporary times were once categorised under OBC category. This group include Gawada, Kunbi, Velip and Dhangars. This groups during their struggle for the inclusion in the list of Goan Scheduled Tribes have reinvented the Goan identity as the original settler of Goa. In 2003, the Government of India accorded tribal status to the three communities of *Gawada*, *Kunbi*, and *Velip*. The act excludes the inclusion of *Dhangar* community. The Dhangar community status as Goan is contested as they are believed to belong to Maharashtra. Thus, the Goan ST identity is limited to three groups, and Dhangar continues to fight for their inclusion in ST quota. Recently, Prakash Velip, the leader of the tribal movement has opposed the inclusion of Dhangar in the Goan ST category, on the grounds that the inclusion of Dhangar in the list would amount to the reduction of quota to the existing ST community (Team Herald 2024). The clash of interests has divided the subaltern Goans.

Amidst the division among the subaltern Goans, the political assertion of subaltern Goan identity emerged in the form of Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP). The party established in the year 2022, by Catholic and

Hindu Bahujan youths. The party built sentiments among the Goans by opposing 'non-Goans'. It initially channelised anger against the lower-class migrants especially from Karnataka engaged in small and medium scale businesses in Goa. The party raises concerns due to the change in demography of Goa as a result of migration from neighbouring states. It received enormous support from the overseas Catholic Bahujan population in the form of financial grants. The overwhelming support RGP received indicates the sentiments towards preservation of Goan identity among the overseas Goan population. The party contested the state assembly election in 2022, winning third position after BJP and Congress and more vote share than AAP and Trinamool Congress, with almost 9.5% of vote share and one seat (Janwalkar 2022). The main issue of the party which attracted the attention of the people is the 'People of Goan Origin' or POGO bill. It promised to introduce the POGO bill in assembly if voted to power. As per POGO, all persons or their forefathers born in Portuguese territory of Goa before December 20, 1961 are Goans. The cutoff date seeks to determine who the Goan is. Though the attempt to introduce the POGO bill in the assembly by the sitting MLA Viresh Borkar got rejected on the ground of challenging the Constitution, the wide support the party received in the 2022 Assembly elections from subaltern classes marks the assertion of Subaltern Goan identity. It foregrounds subaltern contestations over the land management and its use in coming years.

This political assertion of Subaltern Goan clashes with the neo-Goans. The stakeholders in state government promote the sale of coastal land to the rich classes from across the parts of India. After the unsuccessful attempt to introduce the POGO bill in the assembly, RGP is trying to remain relevant by constantly highlighting the issue of selling of land to the outsiders. Thus, the core of Goan identity has remained aligned to the land interests. The land ownership in Goa has enabled the rich class from other states to claim a share in the Goan identity. The land ownership remained an intricate issue in Goa as many subaltern Goans do not own the land where they have been residing for years. The non-ownership of land is an outcome of the historical injustice as the land in the Portuguese Goa was a private property of landlord, temple, church, and the comunidade (collective land ownership belonging to village heads from upper caste). Though the passing of tenancy act resulted in the partial transfer of land title to the tenants, most of these cases remain unresolved. As a result, Subaltern Goans face a threat of being subjected to the status of 'non-Goans' due to the absence of land ownership. RGP shifts Subaltern Goan from linguistic identity to livelihood centric identity.

## Conclusion

The Goan identity has undergone a significant shift over the course of history. Once expressed in linguistic terms, the land relations continue to dominate its composition in present-day Goa. The control over land consolidates the claims of 'neo-Goans' to the Goan identity, while the lack of it marginalises the Subaltern Goans accessing it. In present day Goa, subaltern Goans are from realising Goan identity that native Goans (Bhatcars) and Neo- Goans access.

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## Myth in Contemporary Popular Indian English Fiction and its Identity Politics

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**Abstract-** *The post-millennial period is witnessing a sudden resurgence in mythology inspired by Indian English fiction. The period is also a witness to the hegemonisation of nationalist discourse by ideologues. The present paper explores the relationship between these two phenomena: how the appropriation of myth in the novels plays a role in the construction of national identity. Defining 'us' and 'others' is crucial in identity politics. It is observed that present narratives of nationalism in India define the national character in terms of religious and cultural identity. Through the textual analysis of the primary texts, the paper explores how myths are appropriated in the novels to define the identity of 'Indian.'*

### **Key Terms: Myth, Nationalism, Popular fiction**

The concept of national identity and nationhood is a socially constructed notion governed by the process of social identity and self-categorization (Reicher and Hopkins 2001). This construction defines not just the 'us' but also the 'others' who are seen as a threat to national integrity. Consequently, the definition of who belongs to a nation is constantly evolving and subject to debate. The triumph of one definition over the other depends on the power dynamics of the society. The shared identification and self-categorization further lead to the stereotyping of the 'self' and the 'others', which is central to mobilization (Haslam 1997). A similar phenomenon is now being witnessed in the post-millennial Indian context. The nationalist discourses that incline towards religion, equate ethnic and religious identity with national identity. The writings of nationalist ideologues as observed by Jafferelot(2009) and Bhatt (2020) define national identity in religious and cultural terms. Furthermore, they observe that Savarkar, in his *Essential of Hindutva*, emphasises that only Hindus who consider India as 'Pitrubhoomi' and 'Punyabhoomi' are eligible to be Indians (67 ). The definition excludes non-Hindus.



Such categorization of national identity, as emphasized by Stephen Berger in his article 'On the Role of Myths of History and History in Construction of National Identity in Modern Europe', creates national myths. Nationalism is a modern concept yet has pre-modern antecedents. It is in this space that myths enter the nationalist discourse. National myths are accounts of history or legends of the national past that often deify a nation. Critics and thinkers have pointed out that such accounts are mere distortions rather than having any truth claims to it. As Antony D Smith explains in his *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, myths and symbols shape national identity. He argues that nationalism gains power through myths, traditions, symbols, and the process through which they rediscover the nation's past (1993,223). The myth shapes the collective memory of the past, dominating the national identity. As Bruce Lincoln points out, myths are 'ideologically weighed narratives' (1999,147) and play a vital role in identity politics. The present paper explores such construction of national identity in contemporary popular Indian English fiction. Through the textual analysis of selected texts, the study examines the appropriation of myths resulting in identity politics.

The texts selected for the study are *Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy*, *Ashwin Sanghi's Krishna Key*, and *Vineet Bajpai's The Harappa Series*. All the texts are post-millennial Best-Selling Indian English fiction that appropriates myth.

**Shiva Trilogy:** Shiva Trilogy, written by Amish Tripathi, comprises three editions -*The Immortals of Meluha*(2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2012) and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013). The trilogy presents the story of Shiva and characters from the Shiva Puranas like Sati, Ganesha, Karthika and Kali. The story set in 1900BC presents a narrative mixed with history, myth and events that resonate with contemporary instances. The author portrays Lord Shiva as a human being rather than a deity born into the world to destroy Evil. As a human being, he uses different strategies to battle Evil and, in the process, he becomes the Neelakant.

**Krishna Key:** It is a 2012 anthropological thriller by Ashwin Sanghi. The story revolves around Mohan Saini, a historian who is accused of murdering his friend Anil Varshney. To emerge innocent, he follows many clues left by his friend and, in the process, investigates the past of Indian Mythology. The author presents the history of the Mahabharata through the protagonist, who himself is a descendant of Lord Krishna and is from the Saini tribe of the Yadava Clan. The novel also presents the story of Lord Krishna in a parallel plot.

**Harappa Series:** A trilogy written by Vineet Bajpai consists of *Harappa: The Curse of Blood River* (2017), *Pralay: The Great Deluge* (2018) and *Kaashi: The Secret of the Black Temple* (2018). The series blends myth and history in a story in two tracks: one set in 1700 BC and the other in contemporary times. The protagonist, Vidyut, the prophesied Devata, is summoned by his dying grandfather, Dwaraka Shastri. Vidyut's bloodline goes back to Vivasvan Pujari, the leader of Harappa, in 1700 BC. The family carries a secret and a curse that binds Vidyut and his bloodline to fight against Evil. The novel also appropriates the myth of Kalki Avatar.

### The Myth of Origin

Antony Smith's ethnic model of nationalism explains how the Myth of Origin and the Myth of Decline are appropriated in the nationalist discourse for identity politics. The Myth of Origin explains how an ethnie was born. This helps trace the common origin and common ancestry, which helps establish 'ethnic homogeneity' and 'cultural unity' (Smith 1993,147). In the case of contemporary nationalism in India, the Myth of Origin is invoked to trace the origin of the 'Hindu Nation' to the Indus Valley Civilisation. Hindu mythology is employed to argue that Hindus are descendants of Aryans who are not exogenous to India, as claimed by many, but indigenous. Hence, they reject the Aryan Invasion theory as a myth propagated by the colonialists to disregard the richness of Indian heritage. Golwalker insisted that Hindus have been 'undisputed and undisturbed' land inhabitants since immemorial times and are 'the natural masters of the country' (1939,09). This helps them to claim ownership of the land and establish Hindus as the original inhabitants and the 'others' as Invaders.

Similar arguments are seen in the selected texts as well. *Harappa Series* by Vineet Bajpai narrates the story of Vidyut Shastri, a young entrepreneur from Delhi who is prophesied to be a Devata burdened with saving the world. He is a progeny of the Great Vivasvan Pujari, the chief priest of Harappa. Hence, the story presents his bloodline from 1700 BC to 2017. Vidyut is called upon by Dwaraka Shastri, his grandfather, to enlighten him regarding the secret of the Black Temple. In the process, both Vidyut and the readers are told that the Aryan invasion theory is a myth. He also says that Indus Valley civilization is a 'conspirational term' and asserts that the "Harappa was the Saraswati civilization!" (Bajpai 2018a,70). The novel also presents the city of Harappa with elements of Vedic civilization, like horses, havan-kund, ritual pits, and temples. Harappa is the city of 'mighty Aryans' with the 'righteous Vedic way

of life' (Bajpai 2018a,14). The characters from the Harappa are shown riding horses, seen in the Vedic period. However, Vivasvan Pujari, the chief priest of Harappa, declares, "We are the mighty Harappans! We are rulers of the entire Aryavarta! We are the writers of the profound Vedas, the riders of the great *ashvas* and the founders of advanced metallurgy" (Bajpai 2018a,106). Vivasvan himself is presented as one of the authors of *Atharva Vedas*. Hence, the novel equated Indus Valley Civilisation with the Vedic civilization. The novel presents a continuum between present-day Hindus and people of the Indus Valley civilization by presenting the Protagonist Vidyut as the descendant of Vivasvan Pujari from the Harappan civilization.

Similarly, *Shiva trilogy* also supports the notion that Aryans were indigenous to India. The narrative is set in 1900 BC Meluha but is replete with elements of Vedic civilization. The description of Meluha as an architectural marvel resonates with the meticulous town planning of the Indus Valley civilization. For instance, Meluha is built on a citadel, which helped raise the city's ground level, "an effective strategy against recurrent floods". (Amish 2017a, 11). Many other features of the Indus Valley civilization, like the Great Bath, bricks, roads, and drainage system, are all part of the Meluha. However, the trilogy claims that the period is 'mistakenly' called the Indus Valley civilization like in *the Harappa Series*; *Shiva Trilogy*, too, sets the story in the period of Indus Valley but infuses it with the features of Vedic civilization like temples, varna system and even Vedas. The trilogy is replete with references to *Rig Veda*. For instance, while talking to Parihans, Shiva explains a hymn dedicated to fire Agni from *Rig Veda* (Amish 2017b, 206).

Another post-millennial Indian English Fiction that employs the Myth of Origin is *The Krishna Key* by Ashwin Sanghi. The novel also equates the Indus Valley with Vedic civilization. Through the characters of Ravi Mohan and Anil Varshney, the novel argues that Sarasvati, the mythical river mentioned in the Vedas, is historical. Ravi Mohan insists that,

The idea of the Sarasvati being a mythical river is just as ridiculous as the Aryan invasion theory... (Sanghi 2022,29).

The novel also argues that the Kalibangan, which is part of the Indus Valley, is actually "part of this great Sarasvati Civilization" (Sanghi 2022, 29). Hence, it insists that we should rewrite history and rename the Indus Valley the Sarasvati civilization (Sanghi 2022,31).

The novel also argues that the people wrote Vedas of the Indus Valley civilization. Anil Varshney, a linguist and symbologist, declares the Indus Valley civilization was not pre-Vedic but "the greatest Vedic community on earth", and its people "wrote *Vedas* and *Upanishads*" (Sanghi 2022,22). Mohan Saini, the historian, also concludes that the Indus- Sarasvati civilization was the one which gave us "the *Vedas*, the epics, the *Puranas* and the *Upanishads*' and hence Indus Valley is a Vedic Settlement" (Sanghi 2022,86). Like the *Harappa Series*, *Krishna Key* also rejects the Aryan Invasion Theory. Anil Varshney insists that the Aryan invasion theory is a myth invented by the Westerners (Sanghi 2022,20). Then we have Mataji argues that the 'Western pseudo-scholars' were unwilling to accept the richness of the Indian heritage and hence propagated the Aryan Invasion theory. She says, "no record of invasion or migration in the *Vedas*, *Puranas* or *Itihasa*" (Sanghi 2022, 80). Hence, the selected texts resonate with and reinforce the Myth of Origin and argue that Aryans and Hindus were India's original inhabitants.

### **The Myth of Decline**

Having established the ethnie's origin and richness, the ethnic nation model then calls upon the Myth of Decline to explain how the ethnie gradually declined (Smith 1999, 67). The myth of decline presents the story of how this empire was conquered and destroyed. In the process, it also employs other maligning myths which blame others for the wrongs of the past and portray them as anti-national (Van Evera 1994, 29). Other maligning myths validate the discrimination against the 'others'. In the case of contemporary nationalism, the myth of decline is employed to blame the Mughal rulers and present them as 'invaders' who looted India for its material and spiritual wealth. For instance, Savarkar, in his *Essential of Hindutva*, presents the medieval period through the single lens of war between Muslim invaders and indigenous Hindus. Denouncing the cruelty of the Mughal Invasion, he writes, "...nations and civilizations fell in heaps before the sword of peace of Islam!!" (19).

Similarly, Golwalkar, in his *We or Our Nationhood, Defined*, presents Muslims and Christians as invaders while Jews and Parsis are presented as guests (1939,63). In *Bunch of Thoughts*, Golwalkar presents Muslims and Christians as Internal threats. He opines that Muslims are the driving force of partition and writes that "In fact, all over the country, wherever there is a Masjid or Muslim Mohalla, the Muslims feel that it is their independent territory" (2015,152). Regarding Christians, he claims that they were responsible in misleading Indians through their service since their ultimate object is proselytization. He also wrote that people constitute a nation, and in the case of India, it was only Hindus (2015,142).

Such othering of Muslims and Christians is evident in the *Krishna Key* and *Harappa Series*. *Krishna Key* reinforces the victimization of Hindus under the tyrannical rule of Muslims. The story reiterates the narrative that Mohammad Ghazni attacked the Somanath temple and looted its wealth. Ravi Mohan Saini pronounces Ghazni as the most detested looter of the Somanath temple and is adamant about destroying the Shiva lingam. He says that Ghazni smashed the lingam and scattered the fragments on the steps of Jamiah Masjid so the 'worshippers at the mosque would tread all over the Lingam's fragments as they entered the mosque' (Snaghi,116). The novel presents Ghazni as someone who attacked the Somanath temple for the mythical *symanantaka*, which has alchemist properties.

While Ghazni attacking the Somanath temple is a historical fact, what the nationalist narratives and the novel *Krishna Key* distort is its details and intention. For instance, Romila Thapar, in her *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*, shows how contemporary Jain and Sanskrit do not mention any invasion of Somanatha temple but only refer to periodical renovations owing to poor maintenance. She shows how oral narratives and local folktales celebrate Ghazni as a hero and argues that the narrative around Ghazni is a colonial construction aimed at the communal divide. Moreover, in her other book, *The Past as Present*, she also argues that the desecration of temples in ancient times was a political act, not a religious one. Temples were warehouses of wealth and power. Hence, even Hindu rulers like Harshdeva and Paramara Raja destroyed temples for material wealth and political power, respectively (Thapar 2019,74). However, neither the cultural nationalists nor the writers do not recount such events. This selectivity is based on the ideology of cultural nationalism and with the purpose of 'othering.'

While *Krishna Key* presents Muslims as 'other,' *the Harappa Series* presents Christians as a threat. The narrative is a battle between good and Evil: between the Hindu bloodline of Vivasvan Pujari and the Christian New World Order.

Through the character of Bala, the trilogy explores how Hindus are converted to Christianity, not forcibly, but through charity. The man whom the protagonist Vidyut believed to be trustworthy turns out to be a foe. On confrontation, Vidyut learns that Bala was a tribal with 'sub-human existence' and 'poverty beyond imagination' (Bajpai 2018b,72). The 'men in white robes' gave him food and clothes and took him out of his misery. He and his family were 'welcomed into their community', so he swore to be loyal to them forever. However, Bala is killed later by the very New World Order, which gives him the Order to kill Vidyut. Through the story of Bala, the narrative implies that the Christian missionaries are not concerned with the plight of the people but only with their religious imperialism.

Dwaraka Shashtri, the head of Dev Raakshasha Matth, explains to Vidyut, the prophesized Devata, how The New World Order, established in 325 AD by the Roman emperor Constantine, has become a 'tyrannical and merciless brotherhood' (Bajpai 2018c, 151). Many historical events like 'the French Revolution, the formation of the Soviet Union, the Great Depression, the Third Reich, the Cold War, the Arab Spring and even 9/11' were all planned by the New World Order to establish religious supremacy (Bajpai 2018c,151). The only power that can stop the evil vision of the Christian New World Order is the Hindu God Kalki, an avatar of Vishnu (Bajpai 2018c, 248). It is the responsibility of the bloodline of Vivasvan to protect the secret of the Black Temple, which contains the details of the birth of Kalki, from being destroyed by the New World Order. Every character trying to protect the secret of the Black temple and hence the humanity, like Vivasvan, Vidyut, Naina, and Dwaraka Shastri, are Hindus, While the characters, like Romi Pereira, Reg Mariani, The Big Man, The White Mask and Bala, who are trying to destroy the humanity are Christians. Hence, a binary is created between Hindus and Christians. The answer to the tyranny of the Christian New World Order is the Hindu God Kalki, and the trilogy ends with his birth. Hence, by calling upon the Myth of Decline and the other maligning myth, both *Krishna Key* and *Harappa Series* present Muslims and Christians as others, respectively.

**Conclusion-** Contemporary nationalism employs the Myth of Origin to present Hindus as the original inhabitants of India and the Myth of Decline to present Christians and Muslims as the 'others' in their imagination of a nation. The narrative can be achieved only by blending history and myth so that the nation's collective memory can be altered according to the ideology. Such historicization of myth forms the narrative of post-millennial mythology-inspired popular Indian English fiction. The primary texts use myth extensively: *the Shiva trilogy* uses the myth of Neelkanth, *Krishna Key* uses the myth of Symanataka, and the *Harappa Series* uses the Myth of Kalki. As Roland Barthes argues in his *Mythologies*, 'Myth is a form of Speech' which 'transforms history into nature' (128). Appropriation of myth by the ideologues helps them to depoliticize the issue. Hence, the novels come across as mere fiction that creatively uses myth. However, when such use of myth is studied in parallel to the current political dispensation, one can understand the role of politicization and historicization of myth in the politics of nationalism.

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## Political Systems at Crossroads: An Anthropological Study among the Gonds of Keonjhar, Odisha

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### Abstract

*Man, the Homo sapiens, is the creator of the concept called culture, his most prized possession based around which the life of the man revolves. One of the most significant facets of his culture is political aspect which not only dictates the general course of the actions of life but also regulates and maintains the social order through employing different social sanctions. Hence man is often referred to as the 'Homo Politicus'. The current paper finds that there are constant clashes between the traditional and modern political systems among the Gonds of the Rangamatia village of Keonjhar district, Odisha. At one hand, there is the customary law-based tradition of the Gonds that prescribes the norms of social political life and on the other hand, the modern rule based law such as the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, and others that limit their socio-cultural-political lives. The paper, applying the dynamic approach of Edmund Leach, critically analyses the various dimensions of the political organization of the Gonds like their leadership pattern and the changes therein; the governance mechanisms and the changes therein; and most importantly, how their ways of administering law and justice in the society has got a paradigm shift with the advent of the modern political system. The paper ends with suitable suggestions towards a feasible and balanced mechanism of a political system where both the traditional customary law and modern rule-based law can co-exist.*

**Keywords:** Culture, traditional political systems, leadership, PRI institutions, Gonds, dynamic approach

## Introduction

Anthropology, the scientific study of human beings, looks minutely on different aspects of human by in-depth analysis of its culture. Since its appearance on the map of the world, man has been manipulating the socio-physical environment using cultural tools and methods for maintaining equilibrium in society. One such cultural tool is to ordering the members of the community through a political process. It is a reality found in every society whatever the level of development and civilization may be. The branch of anthropology researching the political behaviours of humans systematically is known as political anthropology.

Political anthropology regards man as '*Homo Politicus*'. It considers the human being as a 'naturally political animal' as Aristotle used to claim and attempts to unearth the general laws that govern the lives of people in almost 'all societies' as a cross-cultural study. The main aim of political system or organization of a society is, according to Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), to maintain 'social order within a territorial framework, by the organized exercise of coercive authority through the use, or the possibility of use, of physical force' (p. xiv). On the other hand, scholars like Steven Gregory, highlighted politics in the center stage of socio-cultural life. He mentioned politics, in his classic text 'Black Corona' (1998, 13), 'refers to a diverse range of social practices through which people negotiate power relations. The practice of politics involves both the production and exercise of social relationships and the cultural construction of social meanings that support or undermine those relationships'.

According to Krohn-Hansen (2014), anthropology of politics must study myriad, historically and culturally constituted definitions of the political organizations globally, irrespective of the actors - leaders and masses, states and nongovernmental organizations etc. It is in this context that Edmund Leach's (1954) dynamic approach has been employed in the current research as it attempts to grab the dynamic interpretation of the structures and the systems of relations because politics is primarily about competition and confrontation of interests. According to Edmund Leach, the major constituents of social life are constituted by 'a dynamic vision of social processes and the inconsistencies' (Peirano, 2018). For example, the political system of Kachins of Highland Burma, as discussed by Leach, was unstable and dynamic. It was far from a normative model of societies

like an organic and integrated systems existing in structural-functional equilibrium, as Radcliffe-Brown would have it (Peirano, 2018). As an opponent of functional approach, a synchronic perspective, that could not define the changed aspects of a society, Leach deducted that a society changes over time. Hence, it is always in a state of flux or dynamic. In other words, a society undergoes changes but maintains balance structurally. That means the process of societal change is dynamic and always in motion. This is also called as 'processual' approach in anthropology (Barnard 2000, 80). The same circumstances are found in current research among the Gonds of Keonjhar. Similarly, Max Gluckman (1965) followed Leach's research by using the dynamic interpretation of societies especially, the political systems. He recognizes the internal dynamic as constitutive of any society that brings changes in the society.

The Gonds residing in districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and other regions of Odisha are the second largest tribes of the state after the Kondhs. The present study was conducted among the Gonds of the Rangamatia village of Keonjhar district. According to Shri Girish Chandra Singh, an eminent Gond leader in the region, the Gonds belong to the *Dharua* community. He emphasized that both the communities are same and even both the terms are used interchangeably. He further adds that there was a revolution in 1835 in Mayurbhanj district, known as the *Dharua* Revolution. After that they were spread and settled in different pockets of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sambalpur and other places. Gonds are the second largest tribe after the Bhils in India. With a total population of 10859422, the males constitute 5441476 while the females are 5417946 in number (Census 2011). In Odisha, their total population numbers around 888581 with 438624 males and 449957 females, showing a positive female ratio (Census 2011). The literacy rate of Gonds in Odisha is 59.65%, a low figure compared to the state average (SCSTRTI).

According to Panda and Sahoo (2012), Gonds are the tribal peasant communities. They are often referred to as 'warrior groups' working under the Kingship of Keonjhargarh. Though originally a Dravidian Gondi speaking tribe, they now are well conversant in Odia. Gonds are of various types such as Maria Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, Raj Gonds and Burve Gonds of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra and Gonds of Odisha. The studied Gonds of Keonjhar call themselves as Rajput Gonds and thus wear a sacred thread as a process of *Kshatriyaization*. As far as political

organization is concerned, 'the Gonds of Odisha have no formal kin based hierarchical political organization, to treat the disagreements' but 'village community forms the basic political unit through its village council' (Panda and Sahoo 2012, 20). There is also the inter-village leadership pattern, as discussed later.

### **Research methodology**

Ethnographic method was employed for minutely observing the locals as the most used approach of qualitative research. A period over one month was spent in the field garnering people's perceptions on the political happenings including the very political organization and its myriad dimensions. Participant observation, the fundamental tool for a firsthand glimpse for all manifested as well as latent behaviors, was at the root of research. Besides, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and focus group discussions were employed for collecting data. Several case histories were taken with instances of clashes of modern and traditional political systems. Besides, secondary data were collected from different physical and online sources.

### **Findings & Analysis**

As described, humans as '*homo politicus*', have the tendency to dominate other animals and his fellow beings. The dynamic personality called, the leadership, which is anxious enough to keep fellow beings under his control and enjoys exclusive dominance within the political territory or boundary. Among the Gonds of Rangamatia, the political systems were not restricted to the village level only as the King's rule was more ancient than these Gond villages. Thus, they ultimately came under the direct supervision of the King at the apex level at Keonjhar Garh (then a princely state). The older generation used to say that they have been living here for more than five generations. Hence, it is obvious that at one point of time, after the settlement of the Gonds in the village and nearby areas, the King established its administrative mechanisms to control all the

subjects (as the natives perceive them to be) within the territory, called 'Gada' or 'Garh'. Along with the Gonds, other tribal also co-habit the villages. They are the Mundas and the Sauntis.

### ***Traditional Leadership Pattern at village level***

Two types of leadership were found to exist: the secular and sacerdotal. Though there was overlapping of duties and powers of each functionary, there was some clear cut demarcation of powers among them. The system however acts like a strong bonding due to close collaboration between different traditional functionaries. For the sake of convenience, the traditional political leadership can be divided into three hierarchical orders as far as the general local pattern is concerned. Everyday administrative activities include anything except matters related to religious affairs of the Gonds, that can be only be dealt by the *Mahapatra*, the supreme Gond spiritual or religious leader. The leadership pattern further happens to exist at two levels: at the village (*Palli*) level and at the inter-village (regional) level. The village headman of the Gonds of Rangamatia is called 'Pradhan'. He is the most widely accepted man and the most influential person in a Gond society. The position tends to be hereditary, but liable to change. He should however possess the unique features to be unanimously accepted and loved by the fellow villagers. The King had the power to choose a particular family as the *Pradhan* family based on the loyalty of the person to the King as well as the demand of the villagers; and by tradition, it was fixed that the elder son would be the *Pradhan* of the village, a rule of primogeniture.

Furthermore, there are standard norms as far as the selection process of *Pradhan* is concerned. For example, if the present *Pradhan* has no sons; or if he dies at an early age and happens to be the only son of his family; or if villagers are hostile to him; and if the *Pradhan* is ex-communicated from the society for any anti-social activities and so on, there will be the change of guard for the post of *Pradhan*. Thus, the post of *Pradhan* is not hereditary and it can be passed to different persons as per King's choice and the people's acceptance. Currently, for several generations, the *Pradhan* family of Rangamatia continuously keeps the *Pradhani* post. The *Pradhan* family, it is believed, to be the first settler of the village. The powers of the *Pradhan* happen to be vast and

immensely influential as the all-rounder of the village. People pay homage to him for he performs many important duties. He decides all the disputes related to clan endogamy, tribe exogamy, and family disputes for plots, farmlands etc. He is invited for all the village functions as well as personal celebrations like the marriage, initiations, etc. He not only uses his authority over the Gond but also executes his authority to other ethnic groups of the village like the Mundas or the Sauntis.

The *Nehember* assists *Pradhan* in every activity of the village. The post is not found in all the Gond villages but, existed in Rangamatia. He is also highly revered like the *Pradhan*. The post is generally hereditary but can be allocated to any family as decided by the villagers. Next, in the leadership is the *Dakua*, the messenger. His main job is to give messages to the fellow villagers for any meeting or gathering or communal activities. He is responsible for welcoming all the delegates from outside the village at inter-village level meets. He is the most intimate person to the *Pradhan* because every action to be employed has to be first intimated to the *Dakua*. Therefore, he can be often referred to as the public relation officer of the Gond society. What's the uniqueness of the post is that he can be from any community, and not necessarily from the Gonds.

In the hierarchy of secular leadership, the *Choukia* stands at the bottom. He is the guardian of the village (*Koutual*) as well as the messenger. His house is situated at the beginning of the village. There happens to be a little difference between *Dakua* and *Choukia*. A *Dakua* is always limited to the village while *Choukia* goes beyond the village boundary and informs other higher functionaries such as *Garnayak* or *Mohapatra*. The post of *Choukia* is not hereditary. He receives land and grains from *Pradhan* or from the community properties for the services rendered to the village.

The *Dehuri* is the supreme religious and spiritual leader in the village and *Pradhan* does everything with prior consent of the *Dehuri*. Most importantly, all the sacred materials and equipment for various rituals are only used from the *Pradhan* family and not from other families. He is empowered to observe all the sacred *tithis* (dates) of the villages. He is the final authority on the religious matter, for instance, when to perform a ritual or where to sacrifice. Interestingly, he distinguishes between the sacred and profane. He can identify the ill-spirits though he refers this type of matter to the *Sankha*, the shaman. Therefore, there is a close cooperation and coordination

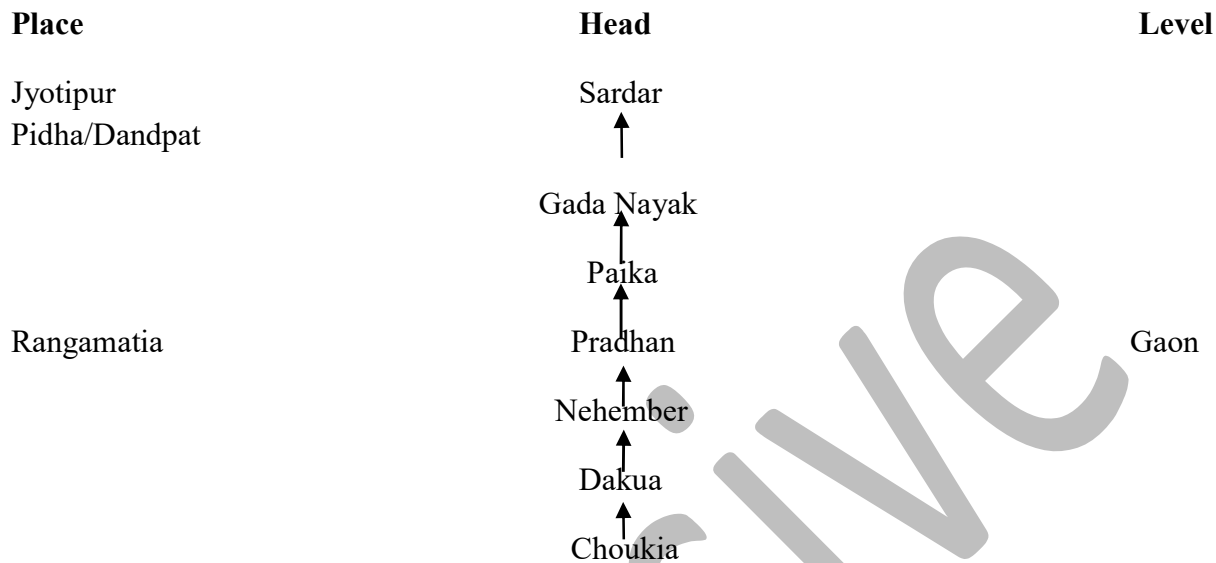
between two sacerdotal functionaries. The *Sankha* (shaman and medicine man) is highly respected for s/he heals the peoples from the evil spirits. However, black magicians like sorcerers and witchcraft are condemned. Whenever there is a case of spirit possessions or to appraise of benevolent spirits, the *Sankha* along with the *Dehuri* inform to the *Pradhan* and the village that particular ancestor or the Gods/goddesses are dissatisfied and that they need to be pacified. Accordingly, a village meeting is organized and ceremonial rituals are conducted under the supervision of *Dehuri* and *Sankha*. The basic difference between the two is that the practices the religious rituals, while the later perform magical spells and rituals.

#### ***Traditional leadership at the inter village level***

A village is not an isolated entity at any point of time rather it is linked to other villages in social, political, economic and religious activities. This linkage on extension is very noteworthy. The traditional leadership pattern above the village level is called '*Pidha*' or '*Dandpat*'. In the figure below, the secular leadership is shown where *Pradhan* reports to the *Gada Nayak* and the *Sardar*. They are deputed by the king (above the *Pidha* or *Dandpat* level, the king used to be the apex authority placed at Keonjhar Garh). The *Paika* is only the bodyguard of the above political functionaries, but commands respect and fear among the Gonds. His post is not hereditary.

Similarly, for any matters regarding the Gond membership in the society or out-casting any one, the ultimate authority lies with the *Mahapatra*, the supreme caste leader of the Gonds while the rituals of purity and pollution is done by the *Parmanik*, as per directions of the *Mahapatra*. On the other hand, at the village level, all the sacrifices and the rituals of purity and pollution are performed by the *Dehuri* that excludes the caste issues.

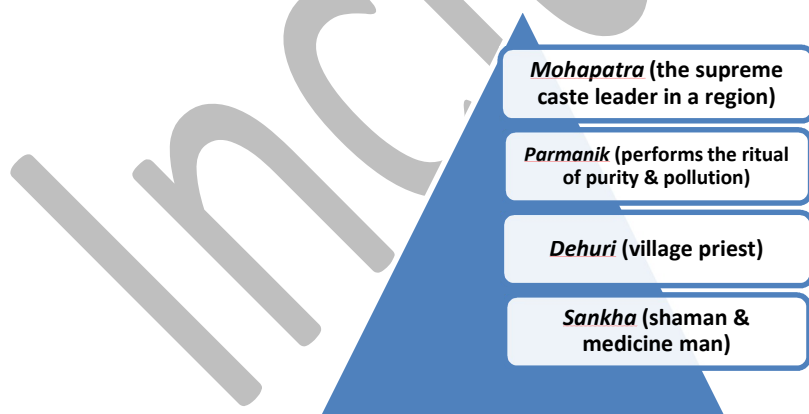
The secular leadership pattern at the *Pidha* level is as follows:



Hierarchy of secular leadership pattern up to *Pidha* level

(Source: Rout and Sahoo 2022, 166)

The sacerdotal leadership pattern at the *Pidha* level is as follows:



(Source: The author)



## Discussion

As Sir Edmund Leach held that society is a process in time, it is obvious that a society would evolve and change from one form to other in due course of time from simple to complex possibly. Therefore, change is an inevitable component of a society affecting its culture. This change derives from the pressing needs of the community and to evade any societal discomforts and contradictions. 'Social systems undergo changes because they are unwisely or because they don't offer the satisfactions to those main needs' (Rout and Sahoo 2022, 167). The current study found that major political institutions including the Gond leadership pattern and customary laws have undergone paradigm shifts towards an open system to prove the point that the elements of culture are very dynamic and thereby form changes from one to another with time. The factors are many such as the wave of modernization, constitutional and legal operations, the advent of digital technologies etc. For example, by the formulation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional (Amendment) Act in 1992, the three tier local self-government was set up throughout the nook and corners of the country barring a few areas. It flourished the democratic framework of India and enriched the power of the people at the grass root level, thereby strengthening the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs): *Gram Panchayats (GP)* at the village level, *Panchayat Samitis* at the block level and *Zilla Parishads* at the district level. It led the formulation of the modern political system among the Gond.

The village Rangamatia comes under the Ramgamatia GP (in Champua Block of Keonjhar district) consisting of 14 wards of seven villages, Rangamtia being the GP headquarters. The modern leadership constitutes the *Sarpanch*, the *Niab-Sarpanch* and Ward members. All the development activities in the village are performed by the statutory leadership guaranteed by the constitution. The establishment of statutory *Panchayats* has led to a serious contradiction and conflict of traditional political systems and the modern political establishment. For that, there is a need to investigate the interaction and the reciprocities between the two levels of leadership, both the secular and sacerdotal as well as traditional and modern political system from a diachronic perspective.

The traditional leadership such as *Pradhan* and *Mahapatra*, has, in a certain way, shed their clutches of power for their areas of interest in the political functioning, both in the secular and sacerdotal field, which have taken away by modern functionaries. The duties of the *Pradhan* are now performed by the *Sarpanch*, the village head under the PRIs system. For example, if any conflict arises within the village, the *Sarpanch* resolves the disputes (Rout and Sahoo 2022, 167). As a consequence, the *Pradhan* remains as a mere ceremonial head not only in developmental matters but also the caste issues of Gonds, where the *Sarpanch* too presides over the village meetings. This particularly has shifted the power relations to the modern PRI institutions from the customs-based commonly held system.

The Gonds have been practicing the age-old form of political organization across generations. While the traditional political instruments have been in the forefront since their appearance and evolution as a society through the use of social sanctions to the members, the modern political instruments have emerged as the modus operandi of those regulations which earlier happens to be the purview of the traditional system. Let's view this from another dimension. Earlier the system of social order was mainly based upon the supernatural and religious manifestations. For example, while practicing law and justice among the Gonds, an accused would be to undergo *sapath* (oath) and *pariksha* (ordeal) so that if he/she lies he/she can't be saved from the curse of the almighty; and if s/he accepts the truth and admits the fault, s/he would be insulted in the village and would be subject to social rejection or outcaste (Rout and Sahoo 2022, 168). The case of the modern political structure is totally opposite to what has been the prevalent in the Gond society. The modern way of justice delivery is based on scientific evidence and logic. Superstitious beliefs and religious affiliations are done away with and rather are humiliated while delivering justice to the victims. This is even quite evident among the Gond youths that the age-old practice of sacrifice, too much of priority of rituals in political decision-making need to be annulled.

In the modern political structure, one significant aspect is that the women play a very pivotal role in the majority of the political decisions whereas the traditional system did not well propagate the participation of women in political activities. This has especially transformed the perception of the people towards the concept of women empowerment including women themselves. At the time of

field work, there were many women ward members in the village *Panchayat*. This has come a long way in emancipating the status of women for they are formally taking part in the village political decision makings. It was however found that the village elders had a narrow reservation about the participation of the women in the frontline of political activities. This mindset has to be modified towards a positive change. That can be possible when direct interaction with the elderly populations is materialized.

‘In the current political situation the Gond community, despite its numerical strength, is less vocal and less powerful at the decision making process. Their traditional political structure has been weakening due to modern *Panchayati* raj system. The social esteem of the traditional leaders is losing grounds. They are being marginalized at the rise of the politically affiliated members representing the *Panchayati* system’ that proves that the Gond political system is at crossroad (Panda and Sahoo 2012, 20). There is a less chance of reversibility of the traditional based political structure.

### ***Cultural Survivals***

Though the political system is undergoing rapid and major alternations in its functional manifestations, the very structure remains the same. In other words, the traditional functionaries exist despite the new forms of leadership and the traditional ways of regulating the society is still vibrant in some aspects of social sanction. For example, the decision of *Mahapatra* in the cases of inter-tribe marriages (tribe endogamy) and the same clan marriages (clan exogamy) is final within the purview of the traditional way of functioning. But once it is challenged in the court of law the decision of the *Mahapatra* or in that matter the decision of village can be declared to be null and void. *Dehuri*, still has the final authority as far as the village fairs and festivals are concerned. And no other traditional or modern leadership can pressurize him to do otherwise.

In the same way, other cultural survivals can be seen in the form of the secular leadership and the decision-making process. Still now, all the inter-village or intra-village matters are first discussed at the traditional *Panchayat* only consisting of the village *Pradhan*, and the elder members of the society. Majority of the cases are sorted out at this level; while cases involving inter-village

disputes are raised at the platform of modern leadership constituting the *Sarpanch*, the ward members and other seniors of the villages. It is interesting to note that while the traditional political system above the village level has collapsed with the arrival of the democratic set up, the traditional establishment still is in intact.

As far as the role of women in political institutions and decision making is concerned, the reality lies somewhere. Actually the women who are elected directly seldom represent in *Panchayat* meetings, rather they are represented by their husbands or sons. However, the reason behind their lack of coming forward and participation is that they work more in the field than their male counterparts.

## Conclusion

With the process of modernization, the majority of rural and tribal societies are in the dilemma. Sometimes they do wonder for a cultural identity. While the modern political instruments in a constitutional democracy provide some better options towards greater political participation and development agenda, the traditional political structure does have some substantial connections to their cultural roots and belief systems, which is very difficult to cut the ties. But change is unavoidable as Leach used to say and the Gonds are not the exception to it. The above discussion with evidence has ascertained that the political system of the Gonds of Rangmatia is in the crossroads. It is confirmed that the systems of political activities and participation are changing at a very fast rate; at the same time, it is also certain that all the traditional facets of social regulation are not on the verge of extinction, rather survivals do exist which have been transmitted generation after generation. Hence, there is ray hope for cultural sustenance of traditional political structure. This has often raised the eyebrows of even the youngsters which they pledge to take care of and feel proud of their cultural heritage.

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## Feminist Ideologies in the Select Novels of Chinua Achebe

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### Abstract

*This research paper analyzes feminist ideologies in selected novels of Chinua Achebe and focuses on the shift of theory through Achebe's portrayal of female characters in his novels. This study focuses on some evil practices against women's independence, male anarchy, domestic violence, denial of education, denial of right to vote, undesirable cultural and traditional practices in Igbo society that are reflected in Achebe's novels. Achebe belongs to a class of African writers who used the resources of language and their literary prowess to emphasize the rare and dynamic nature of African civilization. Citizens in general and women in particular are unknown in his novels. This research paper examines the mobilization of marginalized and oppressed women in African society through Chinua Achebe's novels. In selected novels, Achebe portrays women as enslaved and subjugated to male society. The female society was denied education, brutalized and violated by all of humanity. Although dominated by violations, women rebuilt their lives through perseverance and effort. They became spiritual figures, educators, disciples and predecessors for all. The study deals with the harsh treatment on women and the rehabilitation of women.*

### Keywords

Achebe, Female Empowerment, Gender Equality, Feminism, Male Chauvinism, Oppression, Culture, Tradition, Domestic Violence.

Literature as a mirror reflects the norms, culture and traditions of society. Through literary genres, English writers from around the world explore various themes such as diaspora, marital discord, cultural conflicts, gender themes, family themes, historical development and feminism. Feminist studies initially deals with the historical and cultural aspects of society. Later It includes all types of people in the society and there will be no discrimination of class, caste, community and even gender. The psychological study of feminism includes women's loneliness, subordination, anxieties, worries, carelessness, injustice, domestic violence and marital discord, etc. Joint families of the male-centered African culture are the backbone of African men to dominate women. Men as the head of the family are considered the strength and pillar of the family. This patriarchal

arrangement, which begins with the family, develops chauvinistic control over women. So the man who plays the role of decision-maker in the family refuses to give space to women.

African literature is literature that deals with the issue of women's inequality and how men have been used in the name of culture, customs and traditions. Although a number of writers have explored the themes of colonial issues and feminism, Chinua Achebe is the foremost writer to confront the issue of voiceless women against the male chauvinists of African society. Africans were enslaved and subjected to racial discrimination for decades in the name of colonialism. In the 21st century, Africans achieved some form of independence from colonialism. Africans have been freed from colonial hands, but women in African society are still under the control of men. With the wide spread of literary works and educational institutions around the world, women are gradually gaining their rights; African women are no exception in gaining freedom from the clutches of male chauvinists.

The term 'Feminism' originated in France in 1872, in the Netherlands, then in England in the 1890s and in America in 1910. It is a social and cultural movement that goes against age-old traditional customs. It is a movement to bond women to reach their common rights. After the development of this feminist society, women are considered equal to men and are given education, right to vote, right to sue and work. Economic independence after their education plays an important role in gaining their rights and respect in the family. After the feminist movement and regular campaigns, the rate of domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment and injustice against women gradually decreased. After the establishment of three waves of feminism from the 1960s to the 1990s, women's struggle for emancipation and basic rights, which help them achieve their empowerment and personal potential, disappeared.

Black feminists have had to suffer a little harder to gain their equality because they are in a traditional adapted African country. Although feminism started in Western countries, it later moved to the African continent too. Only after the adaptation of feminism will people realize that it is a movement to achieve life. Black writers of the African continent have played an important role for the development of women through their literary works. Among black women writers, Chinua Achebe is a black Nigerian writer who paved the

way for feminism with his literary works. Albert Chinyulumogu Achebe was born in 1930 in Nigeria. In addition to *Things Fall Apart* (1958), he also wrote *Man of the People* (1966), *Arrow of God* (1964), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Chinua Achebe rose to prominence in contemporary African literature as a result of all these books. Achebe's novels have been widely translated into many languages to form the African Trilogy. He is acknowledged as being the 'Father of African Literature'. He practices post-colonial Christianity and is influenced by Igbo culture. For his literary contributions, he was honoured with multiple national and international awards.

In Achebe's style, which combines direct narration with folktales, proverbs, and oratory, he extensively draws from the Igbo oral tradition. His writings touch on issues of politics, history, gender roles, culture, and colonialism. Every year, the Chinua Achebe Literary Festival acknowledges his legacy. Social roles that encompass a range of behaviours and attitudes that are often deemed appropriate, right, or desirable for an individual based on that person's biological or perceived sex are known as gender roles, or sex roles. In general, gender roles revolve around the ideas of masculinity and femininity. Achebe's literature frequently addresses societal perceptions of men's and women's duties in relation to these ideas. Accusations of sexism have been made against him because of his depiction of the traditionally patriarchal Igbo society, where the most macho men take multiple wives and women are disciplined frequently. It is ironic that Igbo culture, which places a high importance on individual achievement, also considers the possession or acquisition of women to be a sign of success.

Similar to *Things Fall Apart* Igbo society is fiercely against violence, even if Okonkwo's ability to punish his women is inextricably linked to his dignity. Within the domain of attaining elevated status by individual accomplishments, women are intrinsically excluded. The way that women are portrayed in Achebe's writings appears to be a reflection of the shifts that Nigerian society has experienced regarding the status of women and their potential roles in it. Immediately following independence, political power was seen as the exclusive domain of men. In addition to ruling their households, they viewed women as little more than objects to be married off and then tasked with taking care of the man and his children. The prominence of women's roles in Nigerian society increased as the country began to develop and civilization crept in.



Achebe presented the life of Igbo women by society and suppression by women. Although the world is evolving and giving more importance to women's society, Africans treat women as mere objects, materials or pleasure-seeking machines. Through perfect illustrations from the English-speaking Igbo society, Achebe presented himself well. The interpretation of Achebe through the prism of femininity, according to some, is "an Afro centric concept created from global feminism to analyze the condition of black African women" that recognizes the oppression of women by patriarchy and highlights the dignity and resistance of African women, thereby providing a framework for understanding Igbo concepts of gender.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe is referred to as 'the mother within' and is portrayed as a personal deity; in contrast, Okonkwo's wild masculinity wins over everything 'feminine' in his life, including his own conscience. Okonkwo's father was called an agbalu, a name that means "woman" and also refers to a male without a title. Okonkwo's feminization of his father's fear and laziness epitomises the Igbo image of any male who is perceived as a failure. His extreme dread of feminine, which he manifests via aggression against his community, verbal and physical abuse of his wives, persistent concerns that his son Nwoye is not macho enough, and his longing for a daughter named Ezinma, is what drives his preoccupation with masculinity. Igbo women have historically had leadership roles in their villages, yet the women in the book are submissive, reserved, and lacking in power.

*Things Fall Apart's* main character, Okwonkwo, was a big, strong man with red eyes, a big, flat nose, and cursed hair. He was married three times and was a severe disciplinarian. He requested his ageing wife to look after the boy when she questioned how long he had been living with them. 'He belongs to the clan: he told her so take care of him,' he angrily yelled at her, telling her not to doubt his statement. He remains with us. He said, 'Do as you are told, woman' (Achebe, 1969: 18). 'When will you become one of the elders of the A mafia? bellowed Okwonkwo in a stutter. When she asked him how long he was staying, he not only yelled at her but also mocked her, asking, 'When will you become one of the elders of Amofia?' The elder wife should drink first, followed by the other women, if a man has four wives. Okwonkwo requested that his first wife sip the first, followed by her second and third. 'Nasi is the first wife and the others could not drink before her, so

they waited' (Achebe. 1969: 22) is the sole instance in which Chinua Achebe gives the lady credit for what she deserves.

Chinua Achebe discusses how widespread it is in Nigerian culture to characterise ladies as stupid in his second book, *No Longer at Ease*. The dialogue between Obi and Joseph makes this clear, even if it happened in a novel; literature often reflects the state of society as it is in real life. When the girl agreed to let him dance, the man was overjoyed. Joseph's statement that 'dance is very important nowadays' makes this very evident. If you can't dance, no female will look at you (Achebe 1960:16). A different scene in which Joseph says, 'She was a nice girl, but sometimes stupid, sometimes I wish we hadn't broken up, she was just mad at me and she was a virgin, which is very rare,' contradicts the situation that seems to give the girl the right to judge the man. When he had sex with her and discovered she was a virgin, he was naive but kind.

He said, 'Her lips and nails were bright red, though she left a foul taste on Obi's mouth,' referring to the woman Joseph had brought. Girls, in Chinua Achebe's opinion, are erratic creatures that frequently change their ideas due to a conflict of personalities. Clara's speech makes this extremely evident and kissed Obi: 'She trembled as he kissed her again and again. Leave me, she whispered. I love you, she was silent for a moment, as if she was melting in his arms. You did not say suddenly: "We are only stupid. You'll forget it in the morning, she looked at him and he kissed her violently' (Achebe .1960: 33).

According to society, a woman is worthless if she doesn't get money. Describing the conversation between Joseph and Obi, he said: 'It is a pity that my three elder sisters are married too soon for us to earn money for them. We will try to earn from the others' (Achebe .1960: 47). He wants to make money off his sisters when their husbands have paid the price of pride. They treated their sisters like animals to be sold for money. 'When Obi traveled to visit his relatives in the village, sharing a place in the truck with a young woman who sat on his left, he did not fall asleep, pressed his child neatly to his breast, closed his eyes and imagined that she was Clara' (Achebe .1960: 51).

Women are sensitive and vulnerable by nature. Chinua Achebe changed their nature by describing one of his female characters as stronger than iron: 'She was stronger than iron and the other children in the neighborhood were afraid of her, even the boys' (Achebe .1960:69). Not only does this description reveal that she's only strong, it's also nonsensical. It is very normal to describe the girl as stupid and idiotic when Obi talks to his mother and says that: 'That is why the father classed them as a foolish maiden' (Achebe .1960:71). Obi mainly cheated on girls when he kissed one of them, "The result is that one of the Obi can kiss a girl and mumble. 'I love you' (NLE .P No.80).

Chinua Achebe is a symbol of the how society regards women who work as prostitutes. The way his character Clary is described makes this very clear. To assist him in finding a physician, Obi went to his acquaintance. 'But my attitude to these things is completely different, when I am in the east, a girl came to me and said that I did not find and I told her,' he said, adding, 'I think she is pregnant, his friend blames him." proceed to find it'. (Chinua Achebe 1960:165). The women and girls in Chinua's work are never shown any gratitude by the characters; instead, they are looked down upon, treated like animals, and given little worth. However, prostitution was never mentioned in his earlier book. This illustrates the colonists' impact on Nigerian culture.

*Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* include female protagonists with quite contrasting morals. In 1964, Achebe published his book *Arrow of God*. The novel's idea originated after Achebe learned in 1959 that a local authority had imprisoned a high priest. After seeing a set of Igbo artifacts that archaeologist Thurstan Shaw had recovered from the region, a year later, he became even more inspired. The Woman's Image in *Arrow of God* It is evident that Chinua Achebe's views of women are in direct opposition to the generosity of women to children in this book: 'That day, he saw a thin moon, akin to an orphan fed reluctantly by a cruel foster mother.' (Achebe 2008: 1). it makes perfect sense that Achebe would treat women differently. 'I tell you, if you want your madness to be gross, bring my dinner another time at this time,' Ezulu remarked to one of his wives. (Achebe 2008: 9). Wife battering is a common occurrence in the Nigerian community: 'Akewe frequently reported to her family that her husband was abusing her." Profit arrived one early morning with a swollen face'. (Achebe, 2008:11).

The way society perceives women as animals was presented by Chinua Achebe: 'All carrying a huge load of five or six pots held together by a network of ropes on the side of the basket and appeared in the half-light like a ghost in a fantastic head' (Achebe.2008: 19). The cultural complexity of the artefacts caught Achebe off guard. Achebe combined these historical pieces and started working on *Arrow of God* seriously when a friend sent him a number of documents from colonial officers. Similar to Achebe's earlier books, critics gave *Arrow* great reviews. In 1974, a revised edition that addressed the 'certain structural weaknesses' was issued. Achebe called them.

The connections between Igbo heritage and European Christianity are also examined in this study article. The story of Ulu's main priest, Ezeulu, is told in this novel, which is set in the village of Umuaro at the start of the twentieth century. Astonished at the intensity of British involvement in the region, he gives his son the task of discovering the foreigners' secrets. Ezeulu is overcome by the horror that ensues. American author John Updike wrote to Achebe expressing his astonished appreciation for the protagonist of *Arrow of God*'s abrupt downfall. The author's bravery in penning "an ending few Western novelists would have invented" was commended by him. In response, Achebe stated that because African literature is rooted in communal life and characters are heavily "subject to non-human forces in the universe," it is uncommon to find an autonomous hero in African literature. *Anthills of Savannah*'s Beatrice Nwanyibuife is Achebe's first major female character. Beatrice, a self-reliant lady in the city, aspires to the equilibrium that Okonkwo desperately lacks. Defying the notions that she requires a man, she gradually gets to know Idemili, a goddess who tempers the aggression of masculine authority. Even though the last parts of the book depict her as a protective mother, Beatrice is emphatic that women shouldn't be restricted to these roles.

African countries believe and worship nature as women and God, but when we come to a partial vision, they consider living women as mere objects, pleasure machines, and slaves to male society and suppressed in the name of freedom and liberty management. The treatment of women in African society reflects Achebe very carefully. The life of oppressed women needs a tool to portray to the whole world, so Chinua Achebe took literature as a platform to illustrate the plight of women's society. African culture has a heritage and is rich in

diversity. But because of the suppression of women in world society, they did not flourish. Chinua Achebe has images of Igbo tribal tradition, society and religion and how they lived together with nature rather than hating or destroying nature. Despite the stereotypical framing, they were treated and looked like the opposite sex rather than our own blood.

Although male protagonists, female characters are iconic in Chinua Achebe's selected novels. This research has been strengthened through various critiques of women's society in Chinua Achebe's novels through exquisite depiction and narration. As a result, Achebe expresses this by providing important roles to female characters in his second book. The portrayal of women as influential figures in the civil service and decision-making process may also have served as Achebe's way of trying to make his readers understand that women's active participation in society would accelerate its development, rather than merely reflecting it. The evidence here, however, seems to point to Achebe's recognition of the inequities that women in traditional Nigerian culture suffered and the ways that alterations to that same culture affected societal perceptions of women. The impulse to break free from the patriarchal mould that confines Nigerian women to subjugated political roles through the perpetuation of negative stereotypes by men in an attempt to gain public recognition informs feminist writing.

This study looks at how society's advancements have impacted Chinua Achebe's portrayal of marginalised women. Achebe, a well-known writer of post-colonial literature, has a powerful style for expressing the social and cultural norms of the Ibo people in Nigeria, Africa. Postcolonial feminism is the analytical lens through which the novels are examined. The relationship and confluence between feminism and postcolonialism is explored by postcolonial feminism. It's interesting to watch this interaction occur. The results demonstrate that, in both the conventional patriarchal culture and the novel, women are represented as content, peaceful members of the community despite being routinely beaten, denied the right to participate in group decision-making, and demonized by sayings and proverbs. Other noteworthy revelations, meanwhile, include the fact that women play a significant role in the community's religious system and that Achebe mocked it in his book by punishing Okonkwo for beating his wife during a sacred moment.

Achebe's novels are not anthropological but historical novels. Achebe follows the decline and falls of the Igbo utopia towards the political evil of a corrupt society and in this case logically presents the Igbo connection with historical change and tragedy, deftly using his sense of modern life and past existence.

Through his novels, Achebe cleverly traces the place of women in African society; this research paper beautifully analyzes the role and phase of women in the lives of African men. Embracing the structure and unity of the modern novel, Achebe effectively creates an African oral tradition. His critical use of language, his historical perspective and his unforgettable character made Achebe Africa's foremost novelist. Achebe's fictional books explore the vivid connection between life and history and provide a truly accurate and unequivocal picture of the evolving fate of his society and the consequent social and moral problems of his people.

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## Geopolitics and Genocide: How Major Powers Limit Recognition and Response

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### Abstract

*This paper critically examines the influence of geopolitical interests on the international response and recognition of genocides, with a focus on the Armenian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Gaza crisis. Through these case studies, it is demonstrated that major powers frequently misuse their veto power in the United Nations Security Council to protect their allies, thereby undermining international law and humanitarian principles. This analysis underscores the realist critique of liberal internationalism, highlighting that state power and interests predominantly drive international relations. The findings indicate that the selective application of veto power and the protection of strategic allies by major powers have significantly hindered effective international intervention and accountability in cases of genocide. The study advocates for a robust international framework that aligns global governance with humanitarian principles to protect vulnerable populations and ensure lasting peace and justice.*

**Keywords:** Geopolitical Interests, Genocide Recognition, Major Powers, Gaza Crisis, International Law

### Introduction

In recent years, the term ‘genocide’ has resurfaced with heightened relevance among researchers and analysts, especially given the escalating fatalities, destruction, and humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Israel's military actions have led international organizations to label the situation as genocide or potential genocide. However, major powers, particularly the United States, vehemently reject such proclamations, defending Israel's actions as self-defence. This dichotomy is not novel; it reflects a long-standing pattern where major powers undermine the recognition and

response to genocides in global politics. This pattern is evident in the current Israel-Palestine conflict, where the United States has used its veto power multiple times to block ceasefire resolutions, despite significant human casualties and widespread destruction. The United States' strategic alliance with Israel highlights how geopolitical interests often trump humanitarian considerations. This misuse of veto power by major powers illustrates a broader issue: the manipulation of international law to serve national interests, often at the expense of justice and human rights.

The influence of geopolitical interests on the response to genocides can be traced back to historical events such as the Armenian Genocide and the Rwandan Genocide. During the Armenian Genocide, geopolitical alliances and the focus on World War I prevented timely intervention and recognition. Major powers, including the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, were preoccupied with their military campaigns, which overshadowed humanitarian concerns. Similarly, the United States maintained a stance of neutrality, influenced by isolationist policies and diplomatic complexities, delaying recognition and intervention (Balakian, 2004). The Rwandan Genocide further exemplifies how geopolitical interests can limit international responses. Despite clear evidence of mass atrocities, major powers, including the United States and France, were reluctant to intervene. The United States, wary of involvement after the failed mission in Somalia, and France, with its strategic interests in Rwanda, prioritized national interests over humanitarian action. The UN peacekeeping mission, UNAMIR, was under-resourced and constrained by a weak mandate, leading to a failure to prevent the genocide (Power, 2002; Melvern, 2000). The ongoing Gaza crisis is a contemporary case that underscores the same troubling dynamics. The United Nations and various international organizations have indirectly declared the situation a genocide, while the United States, a key ally of Israel, rejects these claims. This stark contrast highlights how the term 'genocide' is often politicized, with major powers using their influence to shape international responses according to their strategic interests.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of these issues by examining the Armenian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Gaza crisis. It argues that the actions of major powers have significantly hindered the international community's ability to respond effectively to

genocides. The manipulation of international law for geopolitical gains not only obstructs justice but also emboldens genocidal regimes to act with impunity. By dissecting these case studies, this paper sheds light on the critical need for reform in international mechanisms to ensure that humanitarian principles are upheld. It advocates for limiting the veto power in cases of genocide and human rights violations and emphasizes the importance of major powers exercising accountability over their allies. Such reforms are essential to align global governance with humanitarian goals, protect vulnerable populations, and promote lasting peace and justice.

### **Genocide: Definition, History and Legal Framework**

The term 'genocide' was coined by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944. Lemkin introduced this term in his seminal work, 'Axis Rule in Occupied Europe,' in which he sought to describe the systematic destruction of national, ethnic, racial, and religious groups. The word 'genocide' combines the Greek word 'genos' (meaning race or tribe) and the Latin suffix 'cide' (meaning killing), thus encapsulating the concept of group extermination. Lemkin's interest in crimes against groups stemmed from his early exposure to atrocities, particularly the Armenian Genocide of 1915, which profoundly influenced his thinking. His motivation was further fuelled by the horrors of the Holocaust during World War II, where the Nazis systematically murdered six million Jews, along with millions of others, including Romani people, disabled individuals, and political dissidents. Lemkin's tireless advocacy was crucial in bringing the concept of genocide to the forefront of international law. He believed that the destruction of a group, whether national, ethnic, racial, or religious, was a crime that needed distinct recognition and stringent prevention measures. His efforts culminated in the adoption of the term 'genocide' by the international community and its eventual codification into international law (Lemkin, 1944, 1-10).

Genocide was formally identified as a crime under international law by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 through Resolution 96-I. This recognition was further solidified in 1948 with the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, commonly referred to as the Genocide Convention. This convention established genocide as an independent crime and provided a legal framework for its prevention and punishment. As of April 2022, the Convention has been ratified by 153 states.<sup>1</sup> Article II of the Genocide Convention

defines genocide ‘as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group’ (Bloxham & Moses, 2010, 123-124). The Genocide Convention establishes that the crime of genocide can occur in both armed conflict and peaceful situations, though the latter is less common.

Throughout history, several instances of genocide have occurred, each marked by systematic attempts to destroy specific groups based on their national, ethnical, racial, or religious identities. These atrocities have left indelible marks on the global conscience and have often been met with varied international responses influenced by the political interests of major powers. The Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923, perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians. Despite overwhelming evidence and survivor testimonies, recognition of this genocide has been contentious (Joe, 2017, 137-155). The Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979), carried out by the Khmer Rouge regime under Pol Pot, led to the deaths of approximately 1.7 million people through starvation, forced labour, and execution (Ben, 2012). The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 saw the brutal killing of around 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a span of 100 days. The international community, including major powers and the United Nations, faced heavy criticism for their failure to prevent or halt the genocide (Peter, 2001, 75-99). The Bosnian Genocide (1992-1995), which occurred during the breakup of Yugoslavia, involved the systematic killing of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) by Bosnian Serb forces. The Srebrenica massacre in 1995, where over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were killed, was a stark example of genocide. Despite the presence of United Nations peacekeeping forces, the international response was criticized for being insufficiently robust, influenced by the political complexities of the Balkans and the strategic interests of European powers and the United States (Amerasinghe, 2008, 443). In the case of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, allegations of genocide and war crimes have similarly been influenced by geopolitical interests. Major powers, particularly the United States, have consistently rejected

the characterization of the situation in Gaza as genocide, citing Israel's right to self-defence against aggression from Hamas and other militant groups.<sup>2</sup>

While the legal framework for addressing genocide has evolved significantly since Raphael Lemkin's pioneering work, the recognition and response to genocides remain heavily influenced by the geopolitical interests rather than by the application of international organisations or by law. This manipulation has often resulted in delayed recognition, inadequate responses, and, in some cases, complete denial of genocides. The interplay between international law and geopolitical considerations continues to shape the global community's ability to effectively prevent and punish the crime of genocide, underscoring the need for sustained advocacy and robust international mechanisms to uphold the principles enshrined in the Genocide Convention.

### **Genocide and the Geopolitics of Major Powers**

Genocides continue to persist in the modern world, largely due to the failure of what realists call liberal internationalism. Liberal internationalism, grounded in the belief that international organizations and global governance can effectively resolve conflicts and promote peace, has largely failed in both areas, particularly in preventing genocide. Realists argue that international relations are anarchic in nature, where the role of international organizations and law is limited. What truly matters is the power to survive in this anarchic international system (Hoffman, 1995, 163). This perspective is crucial in the context of genocide, as powerful states still dominate international organizations and often violate international ethics. For instance, permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have frequently misused their veto power to serve their own interests, whether in wars or in blocking resolutions aimed at stopping ethnic violence (Mearsheimer, 2001, 47-48). This failure is predominantly attributed to the violation of international laws by major powers in pursuit of their national or geopolitical interests. The active policies of these powers and their misuse of veto powers have significantly undermined the efficacy of international law on genocide. This has, in effect, provided a free hand to other states or actors to commit acts of genocide. The inefficacy of international law, as evidenced by these actions, underscores the realist critique of liberal internationalism and suggests a victory for realist principles in global politics (Waltz, 1979).

International law, particularly regarding genocide, is meant to protect human rights and ensure justice. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, was a landmark in this regard. However, the enforcement of these laws has been hampered by the political interests of powerful nations. Major powers have frequently violated these laws, using their influence and veto powers within international organizations to shield themselves and their allies from accountability. This has created a culture of impunity, where states or actors committing genocide can do so without fear of significant repercussions (Abbot, 1999, 365). For instance, the veto power held by the five permanent members of the UNSC – the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China – has been a critical factor in this failure. These nations have used their veto power to block actions against genocidal regimes, thereby protecting their geopolitical interests (Trahan, 2020). For instance, Russia and China have consistently used their veto power to shield the Syrian regime from international sanctions and interventions, despite credible evidence of mass atrocities and war crimes (Weiss, 2018, 149-150). Similarly, the United States has often shielded Israel from international censure regarding its actions in Palestine (Chomsky, 2015, 50).

The misuse of veto power by permanent members of the United Nations Security Council significantly undermines the principles of international law and weakens the effectiveness of international organizations like the United Nations. This practice sends a message to other states and non-state actors that they can commit acts of genocide without facing significant consequences, provided they have the backing of a powerful ally. As a result, there has been a notable failure to prevent genocides and hold perpetrators accountable, highlighting the limitations of liberal internationalism (Barnett, 2002; Weiss, 2018; Chomsky, 2015). This misuse or limitation posed by major powers on immediate humanitarian response and recognition of genocide can be analysed through three important case studies: the Armenian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, and the current debate on the Gaza crisis. In each of these cases, the response of the international community has been significantly hindered by the geopolitical interests of major powers.

## **Case Studies on the Geopolitical Influence of Major Powers in the Recognition and Response to Genocide**

### **1. Armenian Genocide**

The Armenian Genocide during World War I, where 1.5 million Armenians were systematically exterminated by the Ottoman Empire, highlights the impact of geopolitical interests on both immediate humanitarian responses and long-term recognition of genocidal acts. Major powers, particularly the Allied Powers (United Kingdom, France, and Russia), were deeply focused on military campaigns against the Central Powers, including the Ottoman Empire, which overshadowed humanitarian concerns. Despite issuing a joint declaration in May 1915 condemning the Ottoman government for its 'crimes against humanity and civilization,' the Allied Powers did not take concrete actions to stop the genocide due to resource constraints and strategic priorities (Hovannisian, 1992, 43-47).

The United States, maintaining a stance of neutrality for much of the war, refrained from decisive action due to isolationist policies and diplomatic complexities. Recognition and intervention came too late, only after the extensive damage had been done (Balakian, 2004, 315-317). Post-war, geopolitical considerations continued to influence the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. During the Cold War, Turkey's strategic importance as a NATO ally bordering the Soviet Union led to Western reluctance to officially recognize the genocide, fearing it would jeopardize vital geopolitical alliances (Winter, 2003, 147-149). Turkey has persistently denied the genocide and used its diplomatic leverage to prevent international recognition, influencing the stance of many countries and international organizations (Akçam, 2006). This selective memory and political expediency in international politics underscore the limitations of liberal internationalism in preventing and responding to genocides. The Armenian Genocide case demonstrates how international relations, driven by power and survival, often neglect justice and humanitarian principles, supporting the realist critique that international law is limited by the self-interests of major powers (Smith, 2008, 58-60).



## **2. *Rwanda genocide***

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994, where 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in 100 days, exemplifies how geopolitical interests of major powers have limited both immediate humanitarian response and long-term recognition of genocidal acts. The major powers, particularly the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, lacked the political will to intervene, with the U.S. wary of involvement after the failed mission in Somalia (Power, 2002, 330, 335, 359). The UN peacekeeping mission, UNAMIR, was under-resourced and constrained by a weak mandate, despite warnings from its commander, General Roméo Dallaire (Barnett, 2002, 147-148). France's Operation Turquoise, aimed at humanitarian intervention, was criticized for protecting the genocidal regime due to France's strategic interests in Rwanda (Melvern, 2000).

During the genocide, the international community avoided labelling the atrocities as 'genocide' to evade obligations under the Genocide Convention, delaying effective response (Kuperman, 2001, 110). The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) faced challenges like limited funding and political pressure, impacting its efficacy (Mamdani, 2001). Additionally, selective memory and political expediency influenced long-term recognition and justice, with insufficient scrutiny of the international community's failures (Des Forges, 1999, 623-625). The Rwandan Genocide highlights the failure of liberal internationalism in the face of major powers' geopolitical interests. The inadequate response and selective recognition underscore the realist critique that international relations are driven by power and survival, often at the expense of humanitarian principles.

## **3. *Gaza Crisis***

The Gaza crisis exemplifies how geopolitical interests of major powers limit immediate humanitarian response and recognition of genocidal acts. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly in Gaza, has seen significant violence and humanitarian crises, with major powers playing crucial roles. Since 2008, the conflict has resulted in over 5,000 fatalities in Gaza and numerous injuries, escalating dramatically in 2024 with over 34,000 Palestinians killed and significant displacement due to ongoing hostilities (OCHA, 2023).<sup>3</sup> Despite large number of fatalities and violation of international law (Genocide Convention), the term 'genocide' remains

contentious when applied to Gaza. As per UN, “Genocide is an act committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, genocide is a severe accusation”. Critics argue that the humanitarian impact of Israeli military actions and the blockade constitutes genocide. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented disproportionate use of force, high civilian casualties, and destruction of infrastructure, suggesting potential war crimes or crimes against humanity (Pal, 2023).

Despite these concerns, major powers like the United States reject labelling the Gaza situation as genocide. U.S. officials argue that Israel's actions are self-defence against aggression from militant groups and that the situation, while dire, does not meet the legal definition of genocide.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. has consistently vetoed UN resolutions critical of Israel and provided substantial military support, underscoring its strategic alliance with Israel. The selective use of the term ‘genocide’ by major powers highlights how geopolitical interests influence international responses. The U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide in 2021, amidst strained relations with Turkey, contrasts with its reluctance to apply the term to Gaza, driven by strategic interests rather than consistent legal standards. This pattern reveals the limitations of liberal internationalism and the dominance of realist principles in global politics.

### **Realism vs. Liberal Internationalism: Lessons from Historical Genocides**

The Gaza crisis, along with other historical genocides, underscores significant lessons for international relations, particularly highlighting the limitations of liberal internationalism and the dominance of realist principles. The persistent influence of state interests and power politics often overshadows the principles of international law and humanitarianism. This realist analysis provides critical insights into the dynamics of international relations and suggests strategic measures for preventing and addressing genocides. The unwavering support of the United States for Israel, despite international condemnation of Israel's actions in Gaza, illustrates that strategic interests often take precedence over humanitarian considerations. The U.S. views Israel as a vital ally in a geopolitically volatile region, providing strategic military and intelligence advantages. This alignment underscores the realist perspective that national interests and security

considerations are paramount, often at the expense of human rights and international norms (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007).

The inability of international organizations like the United Nations to enforce resolutions and take decisive action in Gaza results from power dynamics among member states. The veto power of permanent UN Security Council members, particularly the U.S., has repeatedly blocked resolutions critical of Israel. This dynamic illustrates how power politics can hinder collective action and supports the realist view that international organizations are often tools for the most powerful states to advance their own interests rather than impartial enforcers of international law (Smith, 2009). Powerful states manipulate international organizations to serve their interests, as seen in the U.S.'s efforts to discredit the Goldstone Report and prevent accountability for war crimes in Gaza. This manipulation undermines the credibility and effectiveness of these organizations, highlighting the realist critique of liberal internationalism's reliance on global institutions to maintain peace and order (Goldstone, 2009). The Armenian and Rwandan genocides further emphasize how geopolitical interests of major powers limit humanitarian responses and recognition of genocidal acts. During the Armenian Genocide, major powers were preoccupied with World War I, and post-war geopolitical considerations led to delayed recognition due to Turkey's strategic importance (Hovannisian, 1992; Winter, 2003). Similarly, the Rwandan Genocide saw a lack of intervention due to the political reluctance of major powers, with the U.S. wary of involvement post-Somalia and France prioritizing its interests in Rwanda (Power, 2002; Melvern, 2000).

For international organizations to be more effective in preventing genocides, they must enhance mechanisms for accountability and enforcement of international law. Reforms to decision-making processes, such as mitigating the influence of veto powers in the UN Security Council, could enable more impartial and decisive actions. Strengthening the role of smaller states and non-state actors in international diplomacy may also contribute to more balanced and effective interventions. To mitigate the influence of powerful states, international organizations should adopt measures that limit geopolitical manipulation. This could involve increasing transparency in decision-making processes and ensuring that humanitarian concerns take precedence over strategic

interests. By fostering a culture of accountability, international bodies can improve their credibility and effectiveness in addressing genocides. The selective use of the term 'genocide' by major powers highlights the need for consistent application of international legal standards. Establishing clear criteria and independent mechanisms for recognizing genocides can help prevent the politicization of the term. This consistency would reinforce the legitimacy of international interventions and contribute to the prevention and punishment of genocidal acts.

The realist analysis of the Gaza conflict and other historical genocides underscores the dominance of state interests and power politics in international relations. To effectively prevent and address genocides, the international community must enhance accountability, reduce geopolitical manipulation, and promote legal consistency. These measures can help align international actions with humanitarian principles, challenging the limitations of liberal internationalism and addressing the root causes of protracted conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

This research paper has illustrated how the geopolitical interests of major powers have hindered the international response and recognition of genocides through the cases of the Armenian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, and the recent Gaza crisis. Our analysis shows that major powers have often misused their veto power in the United Nations Security Council to support their allies, thereby prioritizing national interests over international law and humanitarian principles. In the Armenian Genocide, geopolitical alliances and World War I preoccupations delayed recognition and response. During the Rwandan Genocide, reluctance from the United States and France to intervene was driven by their national interests, despite the evident need for humanitarian action. Similarly, the Gaza crisis highlights the United States' consistent use of its veto power to shield Israel, underscoring the realist view that state interests trump humanitarian considerations.

Our findings support the realist critique of liberal internationalism, emphasizing that state power and interests primarily drive international relations, often at the expense of justice and human rights. To effectively prevent and address genocides, we propose the establishment of a robust system that limits the veto power of major powers in cases of genocide and human rights

violations. Additionally, major powers must restrain their allies rather than shielding them from accountability. Therefore, to uphold international humanitarian law and prevent future genocides, reforms are needed to mitigate the undue influence of major powers and ensure a principled approach to global governance. This will better protect vulnerable populations and promote lasting peace and justice.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." 1948. [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1\\_Convention](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention).

<sup>2</sup> Reuters. "US State Department Rejects Genocide Allegations in Gaza Conflict." November 20, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-politics/us-state-department-rejects-genocide-allegations-gaza-conflict-2023-11-20/>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Casualties," OCHA, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties>.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters. "US State Department Rejects Genocide Allegations in Gaza Conflict." November 20, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-politics/us-state-department-rejects-genocide-allegations-gaza-conflict-2023-11-20/>.

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## China, Pakistan, and India: Geostrategic Rivalry through the CPEC Lens

Shabir Ahmad Bhat and Ishfaq Ahmad

### Abstract

*The China-Pakistan partnership began at the 1955 Bandung Conference and was strengthened following China's triumph over India in 1962. Based on the belief that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," China and Pakistan formed an alliance against their mutual adversary, India. The alignment between China and Pakistan has endured beyond the Cold War era and has been solidified through the establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has garnered significant Chinese investment totalling over \$62 billion. This deepening partnership between China and Pakistan holds considerable geostrategic implications for the South Asian region. This paper examines the ongoing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative and its potential repercussions for India, a key South Asian player. This paper aims to explore the broader geopolitical ramifications for India by examining the growing relationship between China and Pakistan within the context of the CPEC. It seeks to analyse how the CPEC, as the flagship initiative of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is reshaping regional dynamics and potentially altering the power dynamics in South Asia.*

**Keywords:** Bandung Conference, All-weather friendship, South Asia, CPEC.

### Introduction

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which stands as the leading project within China's expansive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), was initially put forth by Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit to Pakistan in 2013 (Butt & Butt 2015, 23). CPEC connects the entire country of Pakistan, stretching from Kashgar to Gwadar Port. Pakistan's strategic location, which shares land and marine borders with India and serves as an entrance to the Middle East, gives it South Asia's most desirable strategic position. This led to the designation of Pakistan as a "Client State" by some academics, such as Christophe Jaffrelot (Jafferlot 2015, 127). China, which is frequently thought of as Pakistan's all-weather ally, is now playing a



more active part in South Asia. Their shared antipathy towards India serves to bolster the relationship between China and Pakistan. The CPEC, representing the latest phase of their enduring partnership, holds the potential to enhance economic connections and exert significant influence on South Asian geopolitics by providing China with direct access to the Indian Ocean.

India sees the CPEC infrastructure and Gwadar Port as threats because they allow Chinese Navy ships easy access to critical waters in the Indian Ocean. Eighty per cent of China's oil and energy needs are currently shipped through the Strait of Malacca, and as tensions in the South and East China Seas grow, China feels more vulnerable in terms of its energy and economic interests. Therefore, China views CPEC and the Gwadar Port as strategically and economically advantageous alternative pathways to access the Indian Ocean. As China expands its economic engagement with its neighbours, India loses influence in its backyard. CPEC exacerbates India's problems by strengthening its arch-rival Pakistan. The project has the potential to stabilise Pakistan's economy, strengthen regional ties, and transform Gwadar Port into a trade hub. CPEC also promises new infrastructure for Pakistan, including roads, trains, and energy pipelines (Butt & Butt 2015, 25).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has sparked geostrategic competition among China, Pakistan, and India. This competition is fuelled by ongoing territorial disputes and significant regional power dynamics. This paper employs a multidimensional theoretical framework to analyse the underlying motivations, power dynamics, and potential consequences of CPEC through the lens of international relations theories. The China-Pakistan partnership is often viewed through the realist paradigm, where the two countries align against their perceived common adversary, India. CPEC is viewed as China's strategic attempt to counterbalance India's regional influence and assert its power projection capabilities in South Asia. This perspective resonates with the balance of power theory, where states form alliances to maintain a balance against dominant powers. While the realist perspective holds merit, it oversimplifies the complex web of factors driving CPEC. Economic interdependence and regional integration also play a crucial role, as the project aims to enhance the region's connectivity, trade, and

developmental prospects. The conceptual framework of economic interdependence and geo-economics offers valuable insights into the interplay between economic and strategic interests.

The project's route via Gilgit-Baltistan, which India claims as its territory, has caused strategic mistrust and regional tensions. The theoretical principles of territorial integrity and nationalism are critical to understanding India's position.

### **Background**

Diplomatically, Pakistan and China started official relations on May 21, 1951. Notably, on January 4, 1950, just three months after China declared its independence, the first high-level Pakistani delegation visited China. However, the origins of their bilateral friendship can be traced back several centuries to the era when Chinese traders travelled through the region of present-day Pakistan via the ancient Silk Route, facilitating trade with the Middle East, Europe, and other parts of the world. These friendships were built upon a series of significant events and became stronger as time went on (Rippa 2018, 19).

In his 1950 book "Pakistan at the Cross Roads," Christophe Jaffrelot states that Pakistan recognised China at a time when the latter was relatively isolated, as if Karachi, the country's capital at the time, was laying the groundwork for future understanding ahead of everyone else and that Beijing would unavoidably have complex relations with India. Pakistan became the first Muslim nation and the third nation which was non-communist to officially recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC). China chose to trade coal for cotton in response to Pakistan's action, which was praised. Thus began a long-term economic and geopolitical cooperation between the two countries (Jafferlot 2016, 145).

The two nations advanced their friendship in 1963 when they conferred upon one another the designation of the most favourable nation (MFN) and peacefully negotiated a boundary agreement (Zhao & Yaling 2022, 36). China and Pakistan grew closer after the 1962 India-China war, with India being viewed as a shared "enemy." China pledged to supply Pakistan with fighter jets and tanks in 1960. In 1982, seventy-five per cent of Pakistan's tanks and sixty-five per cent of its air force were armed with Chinese weapons.

The two countries signed a comprehensive agreement on nuclear cooperation in 1986, and China handed Pakistan several nuclear power reactors for civilian use (Rather 2019, 42). Since

the two biggest Asian nations could eventually become rivals in Southeast Asia, Jafferlot contends that China saw arming Pakistan as a smart approach to have India turn its gaze westward rather than east. Furthermore, Pakistan allowed China access to the Indian Ocean (Jafferlot 2016, 148).

The two nations have been connected by robust economic cooperation in addition to their military ties. The historic Silk Road connecting Gilgit and Xinjiang was "reopened" in 1967. China and Pakistan are connected by the Karakoram Highway, which was opened for traffic in 1971. A Preferential Trade Agreement was concluded in 2003 between the two countries, opening up markets for products from Pakistan. Stronger ties of friendship were established when the two nations signed the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighbourly Relations" in 2005. Pakistan's exports to China surged after the two countries signed a free trade agreement in 2006.

A landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in 2013 regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Cooperation, positioning it as an important project within China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan in 2015, he signed over 50 agreements, including the landmark CPEC agreement, outlining projects valued at USD 46 billion. The visit represented a historic milestone in the bilateral relations between the two nations. Thus far, USD 62 billion has been generated by the committed investment. After releasing the Long-term Plan for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2016, China facilitated increased collaboration among various stakeholders (Evans 2019, 97).

Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan's visit to China in 2018 marked a significant milestone in relations between the two nations, reaffirming the commitment to strengthen the All-Weather-Strategic-Cooperative-Partnership and deepen the China-Pakistan Community. Concurrently, the initiation of the Second Phase of the CPEC aimed to accelerate Pakistan's socioeconomic development. In 2019, Prime Minister Khan participated in the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which underscored the importance of bilateral cooperation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (Jamshed et al. 2023, 162). In order to plan and oversee the CPEC Project's advancement, the CPEC Authority was founded in 2019. The Prime Minister's Office also formed a CPEC Cell (Jamshed et al. 2023, 165).

The collaborative relationship between China and Pakistan has evolved into a resilient "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership," with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) assuming a central role therein. China perceives Pakistan as among its paramount partners and allies, reciprocated by Pakistan's acknowledgement of China as its steadfast "Iron Brother." President Xi Jinping has specifically highlighted the CPEC as a "landmark project" within the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is thought to be crucial for advancing the strategic cooperative partnership's in-depth growth between China and Pakistan and creating a stronger China-Pakistan community with a shared future. (Ghani 2020, 112)

### **One Belt One Road (OBOR)**

The OBOR initiative includes both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This project is seen as one of the most ambitious development efforts in modern times, attracting considerable attention (Johnson 2016, 5). This development strategy aims to link China with the littoral countries of the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and Central Asia. This policy comprises two principal components:

- i. Belt: This component pertains to the physical infrastructure of the "Silk Road Economic Belt." Beijing's objective is to establish connections between its underdeveloped regions and Europe via Central Asia.
- ii. Road: The "One Road" denotes the maritime aspect known as the "Maritime Silk Road." Its aim is to develop railways and ports to link the rapidly expanding Southeast Asian region with China's southern territories (Congui 2015, 25).

This project aims to establish a connection between the Pacific and Indian oceans. This will link the East Coast and Gulf of Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia with the Chinese coastline. China plans to construct both soft and hard maritime infrastructure. It will cover trade liberalisation, new ports, SEZ creation, policy coordination, e-commerce, and customs coordination. From China to the rest of Europe and Asia, all of the Asian continent is covered by OBOR. It is similar to the Silk Road, also called the Silk Route, in terms of its length (Davis & Balls 2019, 11).

Although China maintains that the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project is motivated by economic factors and will benefit the host countries economically, the initiative is multiphase

and intended to accomplish geopolitical, commercial, and diplomatic objectives. It also intends to address domestic demands as part of the economic transition. This initiative, labelled the China Marshall Plan by some commentators, will increase China's soft power. The Indo-Pacific region will become economically and strategically Sino-centric as a result of this initiative (Aoyama 2016, 12).

**The project encompasses the following economic corridors**

- i. The New Eurasian Land Bridge: This significant transportation route fosters connectivity between Western Russia and Western China.
- ii. The China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor: Serving as a vital link between North China and Eastern Russia, this corridor traverses through Mongolia.
- iii. The China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor: This corridor plays a pivotal role in bridging Western China to Turkey via Central and West Asia, serving as an essential transportation route.
- iv. The China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor: Establishing a connection between Singapore and Southern China through Indo-China.
- v. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: It facilitates connectivity between Arabian maritime lines and Southwestern China, passing through Pakistan.
- vi. The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor: Passing through Bangladesh and Myanmar, it serves as a crucial link between Southern China and India (Salim & Shah 2023, 1091).

**CPEC as Path Breaker**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is like the main piece of a big puzzle called the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. This helps China improve trade and connections with other countries. This huge project costs \$62 billion and is all about linking Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province with the Gwadar port in Pakistan's biggest province, Baluchistan. Pakistan backs this partnership to balance out India's increasing influence in the region (Abdullah 2017, 18). Islamabad has concentrated on three strategic goals since Pakistan's separation in 1971: preserving military deterrence, avoiding Indian interference in Baluchistan and Sindh, and minimising Indian influence along its northwest frontier. The project would support political stability and strengthen Pakistan's economy by investing in infrastructure and

energy. Pakistan believes CPEC can lead to growth spillovers, energy improvements, and infrastructural upgrades.

China and Pakistan worked together to construct the strategically significant Gwadar Port, which links Pakistan to the global economy and provides China with direct access to the Indian Ocean. Gwadar is proof of China's overarching plan and the strength of Pakistan-China cooperation (Kanwal 2018, 13). Pakistan has become a hub for connecting China's interests in Xinjiang, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and possibly Russia, which has wanted ports in the warm Arabian Sea for a long time. This happens through the CPEC, making Pakistan a transit point for South Asia (Deepak 2018, 6).

Gwadar's closeness to the Strait of Hormuz enhances China's "String of Pearls" strategy for Indian Ocean access and energy security. India is concerned about Pakistan's and China's naval presence in the Indian Ocean, as it may lead to a two-front war that would put India's military under pressure against a powerful maritime power. Due to China's initiatives, India is no longer the only country with access to the Indian Ocean (Sawhney & Wahab 2017, 38). Since the Gilgit-Baltistan route's disputed sovereignty, India has opposed the CPEC for a long time. India asserts its claim, arguing that sovereignty is a fundamental priority and that connectivity cannot compromise it. India and China are concerned about one other's rise due to their geographical proximity.

### **CPEC and Indian Response**

Though hailed as a "game-changer" in Pakistan, the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has alarmed India. New Delhi has opposed the CPEC route and the construction of the Gwadar port since its inception. Not long after Chinese President Xi Jinping declared in June 2015 that China would invest \$46 billion in Pakistan for roads, energy, and other projects under the CPEC, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told China that he didn't like the idea and described it "unacceptable". Prime Minister stated at a seminar in New Delhi that regional connectivity corridors "can fulfil their promise and avoid differences and discord only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved" (Perwita et al. 2019, 135).

India strongly criticises the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) because it goes through Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir, which India believes is its own territory that Pakistan

has taken unfairly. Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar expressed India's official stance at the 2017 Raisina Dialogue when he stated, "China is very sensitive about its sovereignty; we refer to the region that the economic corridor crosses as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir since it is an illegal territory. You are able to foresee how India will respond to the announcement of this kind of project without first consulting us" (Amir 2020, 14).

India is opposed to the CPEC initiative for two main reasons. The first is that India claims the Gilgit-Baltistan portion of Pakistan as its "integral" part, and the economic corridor crosses through this territory. Using this reasoning, India claims that an international corridor that connects China and Pakistan passes across the territory it has claimed, hence going against its sovereignty. Furthermore, India worries that the Kashmir dispute will become international if the CPEC route through Gilgit-Baltistan succeeds in opening up (Shah et al. 2020, 35).

The second reason India opposes CPEC is the fear that India's security could be directly endangered if Gwadar gets turned into a Chinese naval base. India thinks that China is using it to offset India's economic expansion. China has offered assurances that the port at Gwadar will be utilised exclusively for economic endeavours. India worries that China might set up a navy base in Gwadar, which could make China very powerful in the Indian Ocean. India sees Gwadar Port as an important part of China's "String of Pearls" plan, which goes from China's east shoreline to the Arabian Sea (Shah et al. 2020, 44). Thus, India has launched its own connectivity plans to challenge Chinese supremacy in Gwadar Port. Here are some actions that India has taken:

**Project Mausam:** It is an example of India's soft power diplomacy. The Ministry of Culture is in charge of the project, which aims to strengthen cultural values and reestablish communication with Indian Ocean nations.

**Sagar Mala:** Connectivity and infrastructure are given top priority in this port-led direct and indirect growth. Along with boosting their capacity, the initiative intends to start the process of modernising major and non-major ports.

**Chabahar Port:** Because of Chabahar's position, India can access Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe in addition to Iran. Iran, Russia, and India spearheaded the development of the

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), offering India an additional communication route to engage with Central Asia.

**Naval Ports:** India is constructing naval ports in countries bordering the Indian Ocean, including Madagascar, Seychelles, and Mauritius.

**IORARC:** India, being a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, took part in the organisation's inaugural summit convened in Jakarta in 2017.

**Alliances:** India's alliances, particularly with nations sharing its values like Japan, aim to advance Asian industrial networks and regional value chains. Collaboration on projects, including rail and road connectivity across Eurasia, is a possibility (Khan et al. 2023, 159).

#### **CPEC and Issues of Territorial Sovereignty:**

India maintains staunch opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), citing concerns regarding territorial sovereignty. The project is seen as a continuation of the enduring strategic alliance between China and Pakistan (Roy 2017, 8). A central Indian objection is that the CPEC corridor transverses contested territory in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan-Administered Kashmir (PAK), over which India asserts legal rights.

China's disregard for India's legitimate sovereignty claims over Gilgit-Baltistan spotlights how CPEC is driven by Chinese strategic interests rather than regional stability objectives. For India, CPEC's routing through PAK represents more than just connectivity between China and Pakistan – it impinges directly on New Delhi's territorial integrity and status as the rightful owner of all Jammu and Kashmir. As the Kashmir dispute has been the primary flashpoint and driver of Indo-Pakistani tensions since independence, CPEC's infringement on Indian sovereignty over this contested region fuels perceptions of the China-Pakistan nexus as threatening the regional territorial status quo (Kuszevska, et al. 2021, 230)

India has lodged repeated protests over CPEC's planned road and pipeline projects traversing Gilgit-Baltistan, but China and Pakistan have dismissed New Delhi's concerns. Unless China and Pakistan demonstrate a willingness to reroute CPEC away from disputed Kashmir or otherwise address India's objections through diplomacy and negotiation, the project will continue exacerbating strategic mistrust and border tensions (Reddy 2021, 61).



New Delhi perceives aggressive Chinese inroads into India's strategic backyard through CPEC as intended to build up a friendly Pakistan while keeping India distracted and constrained regionally. CPEC's infringement on disputed Kashmir also highlights China's selective approach to sovereignty issues, applying different standards to itself versus India (Roy 2017, 5). Beijing insists on respect for China's territorial integrity, such as in Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan, while disregarding India's sovereignty concerns regarding Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh (Reddy 2021, 62).

Unless China adopts a more even-handed approach toward India's territorial red lines, CPEC will fuel an action-reaction dynamic that accelerates New Delhi's security partnership with Washington and regional powers to balance China. India continues pushing back against Chinese-led connectivity projects like CPEC that ignore India's core interests. However, absent concessions from China and Pakistan, India may undertake more forceful military, diplomatic and economic counter-measures to signal resolve regarding Kashmir's territorial status.

## **Conclusion**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor marks a tectonic change in South Asian geopolitics, escalating long-standing territorial conflicts and power rivalries between China, Pakistan, and India. The CPEC has increased tensions because China hasn't paid attention to India's worries about its land and borders in Kashmir. Strategic animosity in the region has grown as a result of the CPEC despite promises of economic unity and connectivity. For India, CPEC's routing through Gilgit-Baltistan is an unacceptable violation of its claims over Pakistan-administered Kashmir. New Delhi believes the initiative is part of a premeditated Chinese attempt to encircle India regionally by empowering its arch-rival Pakistan. Beijing's indifference to India's territorial red lines while demanding respect for its own sovereignty issues, like Taiwan and Xinjiang, underscores a dangerous double standard that could fuel escalatory dynamics. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) isn't just about challenging India's control in South Asia; it also gives China a way to connect to the Indian Ocean through the Gwadar port. This is viewed in New Delhi as a step towards "encirclement" and extending Beijing's strategic frontier to India's doorstep.

Fundamentally, India cannot accept the legitimisation of Pakistan's claims over Gilgit-Baltistan that CPEC implicitly represents. As the Kashmir dispute remains the core precipitant of Indo-

Pakistani tensions, CPEC risks becoming a permanent flashpoint if concerns are unaddressed. Without concessions from Beijing and Islamabad through re-routing or creative diplomacy, the project will continually inflame nationalist sentiments in India over its territorial sovereignty. Looking ahead, CPEC is accelerating an "indivisible" intersection of territorial disputes with an evolving balance of power dynamics. Its routing crystallises fears in New Delhi of a concerted Chinese-Pakistani effort to constrain India's rise as an emerging power centre.

Eventually, the viability and success of CPEC hinges on addressing India's core national interests through prudent statecraft and creative diplomacy. Failure by China and Pakistan to accommodate India's concerns may cement the project as a permanent flashpoint, poisoning the prospect of stable continental integration. A more sustainable pathway involves multilateral engagement to transform CPEC into a vehicle for shared economic development and connectivity across a secure and stable South Asian landscape.

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## Expansion and Inequality in School Education: Glimpses from Delhi 1947-1973

Vivek Ranjan

### Abstract

*This article critically examines trends of expansion and inequality in school education in Delhi during the first quarter after freedom from British rule. It first contextualizes the trends of expansion and inequalities within the institutional structures governing Primary Education in Delhi. Thereafter, the essay scrutinizes the legislative framework of primary schooling in Delhi by focusing upon some important enactments & Rules. This essay endeavors to unravel some complex trajectories of the educational development of early post-independence period through a case study of the policy dynamics, structural apparatus, and socio-political imperatives that shaped primary education in the national capital territory during a formative phase of its history.*

### Introduction

This article examines the trends of expansion and inequalities in the educational trajectories in the history of Delhi in the first quarter after gaining independence from colonialism. These trends are first demonstrated in the organizational structure of Delhi Municipal Corporation, the Directorate of Education, and the larger picture of mass primary education in Delhi during 1947-1973. This is then followed by an assessment of the potentials and limitations of relevant enactments, policies, and rules as well as their implementation. The essay begins by exploring Delhi's educational progress in the first years following independence. Here, the emphasis is on the expansion of school education through the range of programs that the Municipal Corporation and the Directorate of Education introduced during this period. This section provides a comprehensive picture of the various initiatives undertaken by concerned managerial bodies to improve accessibility and the educational infrastructure in the developing capital city. Subsequently, the article critically evaluates the policy framework governing education in Delhi. This includes the Delhi Compulsory Primary Education (draft Rules), 1954; Delhi Primary Education Act, 1960; and the Delhi School Education Act 1973 and Rules, 1973. However, this analysis should be viewed against the backdrop of national-level educational policies and recommendations, considering Delhi's unique status as a Union Territory. By scrutinizing the provisions delineated in various educational enactments and rules, this section

illuminates the intricate interplay between legislative mandates, administrative mechanisms, and educational imperatives within the educational landscape of Delhi.

### **Structural Apparatus and the Trends of Expansion of Primary Education in Delhi**

The Responsibility for the development of education in the Union Territory of Delhi was shared amongst number of agencies. School education in the Territory was administered and controlled by the education directorate; the Municipal Corporation of Delhi; the New Delhi Municipal Committee; the cantonment board and private managements. Among them, the corporation shared major responsibility at the level of Primary Education. The local bodies like M.C.D, N.D.M.C and Cantonment Board had Control over pre-primary and primary education in the city. The Directorate of Education of Delhi Administration was given the responsibility to provide Higher Secondary and Senior Secondary Education; but there were also schools providing Primary and Middle level education within its jurisdiction (State Institute of Education. 1977, 2).

The Compulsory Education was introduced in the colonial Delhi during 1920s. However, much progress could not be made in this regard. Compulsory Primary Education was introduced only in some selected wards of Municipal Committee. After Independence, in 1953, the Punjab Primary Education Act 1940 was extended to Delhi. Four attendance officers were appointed by the committee to enforce compulsory education (Khanna 1962 19). The municipal corporation of Delhi in its present form came into existence on April 7, 1958 through an Act of Parliament. It was composed of five municipal committees: Delhi, Shahadara, South Delhi, West Delhi, and some areas of New Delhi; and five notified area committees and some areas of Delhi cantonment Board. Before the creation of the corporation (1958), education in Delhi was under the supervision of Delhi municipal committee, the New Delhi board and several other municipal committees/notified area committees and private managements. Oldest among them was the Delhi municipal committee (NCERT 1967, 2). With the establishment of the Municipal Corporation in the Metropolitan town in the year 1958, Primary Education became its sole responsibility (NCERT 1967, 7).

There were four kinds of schools in Delhi. Firstly, the Government schools entirely financed and managed by the state government. Secondly, Aided Schools which received grants from The Delhi Government, including those run by foreign missions. Thirdly, the schools maintained by communitarian trusts and societies, such as *Khalsa*, *Jain*, *Tamil*, *Arya Samaj*, and *Muslims*. These were independent institutions, but in academic matters controlled by the Education Department. Fourthly, schools ran by private enterprises entirely on an independent basis (Sharma 2011, 287).

As far as progress of education under Municipal Corporation is concerned, we indicate here with three indicators: number of schools, number of students; and expenditure on education. We find that in 1958-59, when the corporation was created, it had only 630 elementary schools: 542 primary and 88 middle schools. This number rose to 1,005 elementary schools, which included 763 primary and 242 middle schools in 1962-63. It further increased to 1210 elementary schools: 794 primary schools and 416 middle schools in 1966-67 (NCERT 1967, 9).

From the view of enrolment, 2,95,720 children were studying in 1962-63. Their number increased to 3,86,777 children in 1966-67. (NCERT 1967, 9).

On the expenditure side, we find that the corporation spent Rs. 410 lakhs on education during 1965-66; Rs.91 lakhs in 1958-59; Rs. 291.27 lakhs in 1962-63; and Rs. 353.28 lakhs in 1964-65 (NCERT 1967, 10). It shows that the expenditure on education in general and on elementary education in particular was also increasing.

We also find increments in the per child expenditure in elementary schools. In 1958-59, the expenditure per pupil was Rs. 56.12, which increased to Rs.84.15 by 1962-63 and further to Rs. 110.68 by 1965-66 (NCERT 1967, 9).

The Directorate of Education, Administration of Delhi provided free schooling facilities up to class VIII. The age for entry in the schools was 6 years. To meet the demand of the increased population, the Administration opened new schools every year and if necessary new sections were added to the existing schools (Delhi Administration 1976, 31-32).<sup>1</sup>

The decision for the introduction of free education up to class VIII in 1964 gave a boost to expansion of education. Because of which enrolment in schools increased tremendously during the period under study. It was apparent that the enrolment had increased at very fast pace in the three stages of school education. The increase was five times in the primary classes: from 1.2 lakh in 1950-51 to 6.4 lakh in 1975-76. It was ten times in the middle classes: from 29 thousand in 1950-51 to 2.9 lakh in 1975-76. It was 15 times in the Higher Secondary classes: from 15 thousand in 1950-51 to 2.2 lakh in 1975-76 (Director of Education 1977, 5).

### **Analysis of the Policy Framework of Mass Education in Delhi**

The above section makes it amply clear that even though far from universalization of regular Elementary Education, significant expansion of school education did take place in Delhi in the period under study. We

also observe that even though an inclusive programme of universalization of education was not put in place, various ad hoc welfare measures were undertaken for different sections of population to achieve this expansion. However, these provisions differed so significantly in their quality that the vision of achieving equitable-quality, full-time, regular, universal school education remained far from being realized. Therefore, in this section of the present paper, we will try to unearth this paradox and failure from the analysis of different educational policies and the discourse around them. Even though within this section, we will mainly focus on the policy development in Delhi, this has been placed within the larger picture. Delhi being a centrally administrated province or Union Territory (UT), the legislations for this city were framed by the Parliament of India.

#### **Draft Rules of Delhi Compulsory Primary Education, 1954**

These rules were called the 'Delhi Compulsory Primary Education Rules 1954'. However, these rules were not formed under any new and specific legislation for Delhi; instead, the Punjab Primary Education Act, 1940 (Punjab Act (XVIII of 1940) as extended to the State of Delhi remained to be the parent law. The educational norms stated in these rules gave strict guidelines to how the government wanted to shape education in the Delhi region. Delhi Primary education rules were very strict about the attendance of the student. Minimum 60 per cent attendance of the student was compulsory. One more attendance officer was attached to the Enforcement Inspector of implementation of compulsory primary education in 1954. In Different Clauses and sub-Clauses, it laid down the details pertaining to attendance and the attendance officer. In some of the villages, Village Panchayat performed the duty of the attendance officer, which gave importance to the Village Panchayat (Delhi Administration 1953, 31-34).<sup>2</sup> These steps of the government sought to promote the decentralized system, which was the dream of many leaders like Mahatma Gandhi.

Delhi Education system earlier followed the rules of Punjab Education act and code. In 1960, Delhi got the separate primary education act. In the field of Education in Delhi, yet another important development was the Delhi Education code 1965. This Code became defunct when the Delhi School Education Act and Rules came into force on 24 August 1973.



### **The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960**

The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960 had been enacted on 20 September 1960 to provide free and compulsory primary education for children in Union Territory of Delhi. In the initial section of the Act, it defined various terms like approving schools, special school, academic year, attendance authority, primary education, etc. (The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960, 2-3).<sup>3</sup> In the Act, Primary Education was defined as education up to class eighth.

The Primary Education Act directed that the Attendance authority should, within sixty days of the date of such publication, prepare a list of all children in the specified area who were liable for compulsory attendance (The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960, 3). The working of Attendance Authority and Local Authority were to be supervised by the higher authority and if any discrepancies would be found then provisions for inquiry were prescribed. In order to ensure the attendance of the child in school, there was a provision of taking fine of Rs 2 from the parent's of absentee child (The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960, 5-6).<sup>4</sup> This fine was to be taken after proper inspection of the house of the absentee child to check the validity of reasons of absence by Attendance Authority.

In the act existed very strike provisions of attendance for the students. If the student failed to come to school, the attendance authority had every right to ask the student as well as the parent to give the reason for absence. Such parents were required to reply the letter or notification with valid reason. In case of their failure to respond, the attendance officer had right to take action against the student or the parent.

Further, in the act, provision was made for the special schools for the education of mentally retarded and physically handicapped children under the supervision of Attendance authority (Delhi Primary Education Act 1960, 4).<sup>5</sup> It was laid down that after the inspection of the child, attendance authority would allow the child to attend the special school. The act also contained provisions for part time education of the children of poor economic families (Delhi Primary Education Act 1960, 4).<sup>6</sup>

The act lay down that the local authorities shall provide the primary education of the children in the nearby area of the house within its jurisdiction. However, the act did not say anything about implementation part. For instance, if the government school authority fails to fulfill its responsibility, what action would be taken against the responsible officials and what would be the nature or form of such an action. Further, the Act

did not specify the roles and responsibilities of the private or unaided schools: whether these schools came in the purview of the act, or they enjoyed independent and special status?

### **The Delhi School Education Act and Rules 1973**

The Delhi Education Act 1973 were enacted on 9 April 1973 and The Delhi School Education Rules, 1973 was publish in the Gazette of India on 31 December 1973 to provide for better organization and development of school education in the Union Territory of Delhi. During discussion that took place in the Metropolitan Council on Education Bill before it became the Act in 1973, certain members of the opposition, such as Shiv Churan Gupta and Bansilal Chauhan tried to build pressure for the abolition of public (meaning private) schools. Their argument was that the unaided schools obtained their recognition directly from the Central Board or the Indian School Certificate Board. Therefore, these had remained unregulated and outside the scrutiny of the State (Delhi Education Bill 1969, 1-2).<sup>7</sup>

The other side suggested that it was not feasible or advisable to go to the extent of abolishing or nationalizing them. Instead of abolishing them, in their view it was feasible to provide for their appropriate regulation. Such regulation had two forms. First, the reservation of 50 per cent of the intake capacity of such schools should be filled through the nominees of the State who would be sponsored on the basis of open competition along with suitable scholarships for deserving candidates. Second, provision should be made for the regulation of fees and funds charged by the schools from students; and salaries, terms and conditions of the teachers and other staff appointed in these schools (Delhi Education Bill 1969, 2).

Many objections were raised on different provisions of the Bill. For instance, it was said about the Clause 3 (4) of the Bill, which referred to the establishment or the opening of a new school or higher class, was “ex-face bad”. The Supreme Court had already held in a different matter that a similar provision in the Kerala Education Bill, Clause 3(5) of that Bill, was bad, as being repugnant to the right of the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Similarly, clause 9 of the Bill was ex facie bad with regard to recognized and unaided minority run schools. In the referred Kerala Education Bill matter, the Supreme Court held that the State authorities had no power to intervene with regard to the conditions of service, removal, dismissal, and punishment of the staff of an unaided, recognized minority-run school (Delhi Education Bill 1969, 7).

S. Nurul Hasan argued that in the absence of any legal power, it had not been possible for the Government

to improve the existing conditions. So effective legislative measures were required for better organization and development of educational institutions in the Union territory of Delhi, for ensuring security of service of teachers, regulating the terms and conditions of their employment and for changing the character of some of these institutions so that they did not develop and encourage a narrow sectarian outlook amongst the students. The Bill was required to achieve these objectives (Delhi Education Bill 1969, 435).<sup>8</sup>

Let us discuss some of the important and noticeable features of the Delhi Education Act and Rules. Initial sections of the act and rules dealt with the short title, extent, scope, and commencement of the Delhi School Education Act 1973. This Section dealt with the definition of various terms like to recognize schools, aided schools, minority schools, unaided minority schools, private schools, existing schools, etc. (Delhi School Education Act 1973, 3-4).<sup>9</sup> However, this act did not provide definitions like elementary education. Other clauses of the Act and the rules dealt with issues like the age of admissions, management, grant of recognition, power of different authorities, training of teachers, attendance of students, and property of schools etc.

The article of the Delhi School Education Act 1973 dealt with the establishment, recognition, management, and aid to schools. It was clearly mention that the Recognition of schools would be provided after fulfilling the various conditions like financial stability, qualified teachers, and infrastructure with sanitary facilities (Delhi School Education Act 1973, p. 5).<sup>10</sup> In the act, it was clearly mentioned that grant in aid should be provided to unrecognized school and the amount of aid should not be used for the payment of salaries (Delhi School Education Act 1973, p. 6).<sup>11</sup> The management of every aided school was required to furnish the statement of list of school property at the time of grant to competent authority (Delhi School Education Act 1973, 6-7).<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the age of child at the time of the admission in Recognized schools, it was notified that a child, who had completed the age of five years, would be admitted to class I (Delhi School Education Act 1973, 9).<sup>13</sup> the act did not define the duration of 'pre-school'. However, under the educational set up of Delhi, many schools had been running two years pre-primary classes under the nomenclature of KG/ Nursery/Preparatory/Montessori. In the Delhi School Education Act and Rules 1973, provisions were given for admission up to class VIII based on affidavit in respect of children who had not studied in a recognized school. (Delhi School Education Rule 1973, 1-43).<sup>14</sup>

As far as the sections related to provisions of unaided minority schools were concerned, it mainly talked about the recruitment rules for the employees and their code of conduct (Delhi School Education Rule 1973,

18-22).<sup>15</sup> Under the Education Act and the rules (1973), certain concession was provided for minority schools. For instance, there was no need to get the scheme of management approved from the Government and the minority school could not be taken over by the administration (Delhi School Education Act 1973, 11).<sup>16</sup> In case of minority schools, members were required to be elected on nomination basis by the Society or Trust through which the school was established. Similarly, according to these rules, in minority schools, two seniors most teachers should be co-opted by the Managing Committee (Delhi School Education Rule 1973, 18).<sup>17</sup>

Still, there were some very significant loopholes within the Delhi School Education Act and Rules 1973. One of them was that there were no provisions for the facilities for children with disabilities. Moreover, there was no mention of pre-primary stage of education. There were no penal provisions for curbing the laxity on the part of the concerned authorities, which made this act and corresponding rules a toothless tiger. Further, the Delhi School Education Act and Rules 1973 made a distinction between Government Schools and Government-Aided Schools and Unaided Private Schools. Because of this, the Managing Committees of Aided schools lost the autonomy they once enjoyed. This reduced their control over the staff because of a newly granted “security of service” which devolved on the teachers. The selection of the staff was now required to be based on internal promotion or on the lists of candidates sponsored by the Employment Exchange. This reduced the chances of recruiting specially identified Principals and teachers who could maintain the high standards for which the schools had once received acclaim. (Review Committee on Delhi School Education Act and Rule 1973, 36).<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The educational reforms, policies and resolutions brought after independence helped somewhat expand education in Delhi. Nonetheless, the enactment of an effective legislation for the universalization of equitable quality school education in Delhi did not happen. The acts and rules framed or implemented during this period contained many compromises and weaknesses. These were unable to address many pertinent areas of concern. Whenever there were some good provisions, these could not be implemented properly due to political, administrative, and social obstacles. In the ultimate analysis, these acts were not progressive enough to change the society on a massive level.

The most important challenges for the state were the expansion of facilities for mass compulsory elementary education; reform of the secondary education; development of vocational and technical education; encouragement to women's education; and to reorganize the structure of educational administration. With a view to fulfilling all these objectives, the Central and State Governments endeavored to give a concrete shape to various programmes under the Five-year Plans. Delhi being the union territory, the Central Government played the major role in framing and in implementation of Education policies for the city. Of course, these measures proved to be very helpful to improve the system of School education in Delhi. For example, the Delhi Primary Education Act and Rules (1960 and 1962 respectively); and the Delhi Education Act and Rules (1973) had provisions for maintaining attendance and appointing attendance officer. It was very categorically stated that the norm of the attendance should be strictly followed. If any student failed to do so, school and attendance authority would take actions accordingly.

The implementation of any act was integrally linked with the mechanism provided within the same law. Unfortunately, there was no such mechanism present within these rules for their implementation. Therefore, these continued to exist merely as a toothless tiger. Hence, these rules failed to bring any fundamental transformation. For instance, the government did not talk about any penalty or punishment if the administration would not implement the rule properly. It showed the dual nature of the pronouncements of the government: on one hand government framed rules for educational reforms; on the other hand, it did not make effective provisions for their implementation. Further, the increase in the number of schools was not proportionate to the increase in the enrolment of students and the growth of population. It led to many problems like overcrowding in single section of the classes, mismanagement inside the class, etc. Hence, the trend of iniquitous expansion continued.

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<sup>1</sup> Delhi Administration. 1976. Annual Administration Report, 1975-76, pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Delhi Administration .1953. Draft Rules of Delhi Compulsory Primary Education 1954, Chief Commissioner Office, Department of Delhi State Archive

<sup>3</sup> The Delhi Primary Education Act 1960, ACT No. 39 of 1960, enacted on 20th September, 1960, Section 2 (A to I), pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Section 17-18, p. 5-6.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Section 11, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., section 12 (1), p.4.

<sup>7</sup> Delhi Administration. 1969. Delhi Education Bill. File No.1 (22)/1969, Law, Department of Delhi State Archives, pp. 1-22.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.435.

<sup>9</sup> The Delhi Primary Education Act.1960, ob. Cit., Chapter I, Section 2, pp. 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Section 4 (1), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., chapter II, Section 6 (1) to 6 (6), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., chapter III, Section 7 (1), pp. 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., chapter VI, Section 16, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> The Delhi School Education Rules. 1973. Gazette of India, Part IV, dated December 31, 1973, pp. 1-43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Chapter V, pp. 18-22.

<sup>16</sup> The Delhi Primary Education Act.1960, op. cit., chapter vi, section 21, p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Delhi School Education Rule 1973, op. cit., no. 59 (1) (b), p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Directorate of Education. 2012. Report of The Review Committee on The Delhi School Education Act and Rules, 1973 Preamble and Section wise Examination of Issues, part -I. Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, p. 36.

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## East Meets West: Birth Control Debates Between Gandhi and Western Proponents in Colonial India

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### Abstract

*This research paper explores the historical interactions and interviews between prominent figures, focusing on the issue of birth control in colonial India. It delves into the documented exchanges between Mahatma Gandhi and Western birth control advocates Margaret Sanger, Edith How-Martyn, and Marie Stopes. These interactions highlight the ideological and cultural divides between Eastern and Western perspectives on birth control. The study examines the influence of Gandhi's moral and celibacy beliefs, contrasting them with the progressive, scientifically managed family ideals promoted by Western advocates. By analyzing these historical interactions, the paper challenges the dominant metropole/non-metropole binary in discussions on birth control, revealing a nuanced interplay of ideas that shaped public discourse and social reform in colonial India. The findings underscore the importance of cross-cultural intellectual exchanges in shaping societal debates and advancing reproductive health and gender equality.*

### **Introduction:**

Throughout history, interactions and interviews between prominent figures have often served as pivotal moments that influenced the trajectory of societal, political, and cultural developments. These exchanges, rich in intellectual and ideological content, have many occasions shaped public discourse and altered the course of history. For instance, the meeting between Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass<sup>1</sup>, the negotiation between Gandhi and Lord Irwin<sup>2</sup>, are perfect examples of how the interactions between prominent figures have changed the course of history. This article aims to delve into few such similar historical interactions, employing a structured analysis of the interviews and documented interactions between Gandhi and Margaret Sanger, Edith How-Martyn and Marie Stopes on the issue of birth control in colonial India.

Colonial India emerged as a pivotal arena for the debate and analysis of artificial birth control methods, influenced by the global exchange of ideas, technology, and people (Ahluwalia 2010,



p. 55). Birth control advocacy in colonial India was linked to the notion of scientifically managed, progressive family units, seen [by some] as beneficial for nation-building.

Gandhi, who became a prominent political figure in India from 1915, was recognized by Western birth control proponents for his significant influence on public perception. Despite his opposition to modern chemical and mechanical birth control, Western proponents sought to gain his support for their cause. Ellen Chesler, in her biography of Margaret Sanger, highlighted that Sanger viewed her potential encounter with Gandhi in India as a valuable PR opportunity (Chesler 1992, p. 363). Sanger believed that her relationship with Gandhi would appeal to her American audience, overshadowing any philosophical differences. Their meeting received extensive coverage in the American media, boosting Sanger's visibility and advancing her cause domestically (Ahluwalia 2010, p. 58).

Each of the stalwarts presented their unique viewpoints which were influenced by their own ideological foundations. Their encounter exposed the subtleties and complexities of the subject of the artificial means of birth control and at times seemed to override each other. This article aims to challenge the prevailing metropole/non-metropole paradox, in the discourse on birth control, which was grounded in Western universalist concepts such as modernism, development, progress, and liberal individualism, in contrast to Eastern traditions. It does this by contextualising Gandhi's interactions with Western birth control enthusiasts in historical context.

**The literature** on birth control in India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries intertwines with discussions on sexual practices, with several pioneering works emerging from this period. Notable early sources include Narayan Sitaram Phadke's *Sex Problem in India*, Pyare Krishan Wattak's *The Population Problem in India: A Census Study*, and Radhakamal Mukharjee's *Population Problem in India*. Additionally, periodicals like *The Philosophic Inquirer* and *The Madras Birth Control Bulletin* played a significant role in addressing birth control issues during colonial India.

These early texts assumed that since the 1870s, India was grappling with overpopulation, poverty, malnutrition, and illiteracy, threatening the nascent Indian nationalism and suggesting a need for birth control via biomedical contraceptive methods. Phadke, a proponent of eugenics<sup>3</sup>, argued for India's advancement on biological grounds. However, these works largely

overlooked Gandhi's perspective on birth control, only making occasional references to him. Critically, these pioneering texts faced several flaws. Firstly, demographic data from the 1911 census indicated a population increase, but not enough to suggest a crisis. The 1921 census, following the Spanish Flu, showed a population decline, and it was only by 1931 that a significant rise was noted, challenging the urgency these texts placed on overpopulation (Kumar 1999, pp. 463-500).

Secondly, the authors, belonging to the upper caste and middle class, portrayed working-class and peasant sexual practices negatively, advocating for widespread contraceptive use. This elitist perspective condemned subaltern lifestyles and sexual behaviour, reflecting a condescending view of the marginalized communities (Ahluwalia 2010, pp. 23-51).

Additionally, Indian periodicals that published product advertisements, like the Madras Birth Control Bulletin and Marriage Hygiene, those were preferred and promoted by the international birth control figures, such as the Marie Stopes, Margaret Sanger, and Edith How-Martyn, served as a venue for Stopes, Sanger, and How-Martyn to compete for increased media attention in colonial India (Ahluwalia 2010, p. 66), diluted the concerned cause here<sup>4</sup>, to some extent and could be safely considered a short sightedness of the journals (Gandhi 1928, p. 208).

Foreign literature on birth control also contributed to the discourse, albeit with limitations. Works by Sanger, such as, Birth Control Review and Does Gandhi Know Women? What He Told Me at Wardha; *Wise parenthood, A Letter to Working Mothers on how to Have Healthy Children, Married Love, Enduring Passion, Radiant Motherhood, The human body and Avoid Weakening Pregnancies* by Marie Stopes and the writings of How-Martyn often exhibited professional rivalry and biases. Despite Sanger's medical nursing background and Stopes's palaeobotany expertise, their writings on contraceptives faced criticism for lacking proper medical credentials (Neushul 1977, p. 92). Their modernist approach of writing in rationalizing reproduction often ignored social stratifications, leading to partisan literature on birth control. Sanger's writings, in particular, displayed a patronizing attitude toward Indians, aligning with colonial representations of Indians needing Western guidance. Her assertion that birth control would empower Indian women was often overshadowed by her condescending tone (Ahluwalia 2010, p. 71).

Lastly, Gandhi stands as a significant figure in this discourse, offering a contrasting view on birth control. Gandhi, writing extensively on topics like contraceptives and sexual ethics, advocated for self-restraint over artificial methods. His works, *Self-Restraint versus Self-Indulgence* and *Birth-Control: The Right Way and the Wrong Way*, emphasized abstinence. Gandhi faced harsh criticism from Western birth control advocates like Stopes, who accused him of ignorance and selfishness, claiming his resistance to modern birth control methods contributed to India's population rise (Ahluwalia 2010, pp. 73-4) in Review of *Self-Restraint versus Self-Indulgence*. Stopes even attempted to sway public opinion against Gandhi through Indian periodicals (Stopes 1930, p. 13).

The interaction between Gandhi and Western advocates highlights a significant East-West intellectual exchange on birth control, necessitating deeper scholarly investigation. This literature provides insight into the historical and geographical constraints and possibilities of implementing artificial birth control in colonial India and also challenging the dominant Western-centric narratives from a Gandhian perspective. This article challenges the dominant Western-centric view by examining Gandhi's interactions with Western birth control advocates from the 1920s onward.

### **The Nexus of Birth Control Debates in Colonial India:**

**Marie Stopes** of England was the first Western advocate of birth control, in the context of our current discussion, interacted with Gandhi. She did not meet with Gandhi in person. However, the beginning of this correspondence was in 1930, with the Stopes's scornful review of Gandhi's book *Self-Restraint versus Self-Indulgence*. Then, they did again engage in a notable letteral correspondence in 1935.

In her review, Stopes made the case that Gandhi's resistance to modern birth control was the cause of colonial India's population growth. Her proposed solution to the proliferation of unsolicited and unwanted births was to grant her, the authority to disseminate information widely in every Indian language, thereby reaching the entire Indian populace. She asserted that she could offer guidance and enlightenment to the distressed Indian women whose frequent pleas for assistance reached her. However, her response to their pleas was misinterpreted (Stopes 1930, pp. 3-4). The main point of contention in Stopes's criticism of Gandhi was the disparity in their views on sex and sexuality in marriage. As a fervent supporter of sexual

emancipation, Stopes demanded that sex and reproduction be separated. She maintained that having sex in a marriage was essential to matrimony and significant for both husband and wife. Stopes challenged the idea of Gandhian submissive feminine sexuality to draw attention to what she termed women's recurrent recurrence of desire (See Rose 2007, p. 111). She praised female sexual desire as a healthy natural thing. Stopes welcomed and honoured the ways in which women expressed their sexual urges, as important as it was for a man. In essence, Gandhi thought of women as passive sexual beings. Thus, to support their divergent positions on the topic of birth control, the two introduced their starkly divergent conceptions of sex, particularly female sexuality in the book and in the review respectively.

She challenged some of Gandhi's beliefs regarding sexuality, claiming that it was a beautiful, mutual relationship between a man and a woman that was much more meaningful than anything that had ever occurred to Gandhi as a possibility for human interaction. She contended that the use of contraceptives allowed married couple to satisfy the God-given craving wholesomely and appropriately for reciprocal coitus (Porter and Hall 1995, pp. 202-23). Her argument that sex was a gift from God was a rhetorical strategy meant to naturalize it and dispel any unfavourable connotations associated with human sexuality. Gandhi's resistance to the use of contraceptives, Stopes claimed, was utterly baseless and a result of his misunderstanding about both human sexuality and the use of artificial contraceptives (Stopes 1930, p. 45). Gandhi claimed that the use of contraceptives would produce imbecility and nervous prostration.

Gandhi's views on sex and contraception, according to Stopes, were more grounded in superstition than in science and amounted to an ascetic calling on people to embrace unnatural lives of deprivation and ensuing degradation (Stopes 1930, p. 44). According to Stopes, a contemporary topic of desire was a natural one, one that the power of contemporary modern sexology had approved and recognised. A modernist like Stopes believed that science was superior to human intervention and subjective biases because it represented an unquestionable reality founded on sound principles of research and observation. As opined by Sanjam Ahluwalia, any questioning of the accepted scientific consensus, in her opinion, revealed a faulty comprehension of science that was founded on superstition, the opposite of science (Ahluwalia 2010, p. 75).

Gandhi proposed that married couples should avoid sleeping in the same bed or room to maintain self-discipline (Gandhi 1928, p. 95), a notion Stopes surprisingly agreed with, albeit for different reasons. While Stopes believed separate bedrooms preserved the humility and romance of marriage (Rose 2007, p. 198), Gandhi saw it as a means to prevent sexual activity. He also suggested that couples take cold baths to curb sexual desire and convert it into virtuous energy (Gandhi 1928, p. 57). Despite differences, this exchange highlighted the cultural and ideological divide between Western and Eastern perspectives on the issue during that time. The correspondence between Stopes and Gandhi provides a significant historical example of the intersection of two differing ideologies, [science vs traditional] on a critical social issue, emphasizing the influence of such intellectual exchanges on broader societal debates.

In February 1935, **Edith How-Martyn**, the second prominent English birth control advocate, interviewed Gandhi, following prior discussions with his close associates Charles F. Andrews and Jawaharlal Nehru to influence him. Despite personal differences between How-Martyn and fellow advocate Marie Stopes, their views on birth control were remarkably similar. During the interview, Gandhi reiterated his strong opposition to contraception, arguing that it denigrates women by reducing them to objects of desire. He believed that women should have the strength to refuse sexual advances if they did not wish to conceive, emphasizing male sexual discipline as essential to societal stability (Gandhi 1928, p. 188).

Gandhi's resistance to birth control was rooted in his mistrust of sexuality, particularly male sexuality, which he viewed as inherently violent. He idealized female sexual passivity and believed that promoting birth control would further dehumanize women by allowing men to exploit them sexually (Gandhi 1928, p. 45). How-Martyn viewed the institution of marriage as a safe perimeter for the greatest experience of sexual pleasure. For Gandhi, marriage was a sacred institution intended solely for procreation, not for sexual pleasure, and he argued that sexual activity should be strictly limited within marriage to the act of conception (Hingorani 1943, pp. 44-45).

Contrarily, How-Martyn [along with Sanger and Stopes] sought to separate marital sex from procreation, advocating for sexual expression for both men and women, exact opposite of Gandhi. Despite their differing views, both Gandhi and Western birth control proponents aimed to regulate sexual expression within heterosexual relationships (Ahluwalia 2010, p. 72).

Sanjam Ahluwalia notes that within the birth control debates in 20th century colonial India, sexual restraint was a fundamental Gandhian principle.

American birth control advocate **Margaret Sanger**<sup>5</sup> after a series of literal communication with Gandhi landed in 1935-6 winter India for a ten-week visit<sup>6</sup>. Like How-Martyn, she sought an appointment for an interview with Gandhi via Gandhi's close friend, Reverend John Haynes Holmes<sup>7</sup>. Gandhi extended a request to Sanger to come to Wardha, for an interview, on December 2, 1935. Sanger was aware of Gandhi's influence and believed his support would accelerate the birth control movement<sup>8</sup>. Margaret Sanger had this pre-conceived notion that Gandhi was never able to see sex and sexual activity as anything good, wholesome, or helpful since his own experience with his father's death was so distressing and made him feel guilty about himself. She began the correspondence by revealing that the real reason Sanger travelled there was not to determine whether Gandhi and she could reach a consensus on a basic understanding of contraception, but that the main goal was to come up with some workable solutions to support women everywhere (Sanger, 1999).

In the conversation, Gandhi began by admitting that some accomplished individuals, like his friends Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore, backed her and persuasively upheld her stance rather than his own. Gandhi then shot back, saying he could not recommend birth control to a woman who was seeking his medical advice or clearance (Sanger, 1999). After Sanger had shown him some of the cases, Gandhi agreed that women should be free to make their own decisions and acknowledged the complexity of the cases, but he disagreed with her suggestions. He continued to promote celibacy.

Sanger persisted in emphasising the Gandhian concepts of self-control and celibacy by citing examples in which exercising self-control resulted in serious mental and nervous collapses (Sanger, 1999). Gandhi countered, that only fools would feel this; healthy-minded people would not (Sanger, 1999). When Sanger insisted that his advice was unworkable, that it would spark a rebellion in the home, and that it would lead to divorce because the standard marriage contract assumes that sexual relations and the marital relationship will be harmonious, Gandhi then tried to draw a distinction between love and lust. By starting an atomic level debate and stating that it was lust rather than love when both the husband and the wife wished to satisfy their animal passions without having to deal with the consequences of their actions, Gandhi

further clarified his position. But if a husband and wife truly loved one other, it would surpass animal passion and take control of their behaviours and desires (Weber 2011, p. 372). He went on, saying that people were not well-educated about their own desires. When a husband, in most situations, and wife, in some cases, opted not to have children but still had sex, it was a classic example of animal desire. If they didn't want any more children, they could just refuse to get together to satisfy any kind of need. As soon as people utilise love to satiate their primal needs, love transforms into desire. Gandhi valued keeping the husband and wife's relationship as a brother and sister and disapproved of conjugal love in favour of platonic love for a married pair (Weber 2011, p. 372).

It's interesting to note that while criticising Gandhi, Sanger was defending the rights of Indian husband. To preserve harmony and peace within the home, Sanger rather instructed Indian wife to utilise contraception and be sexually agreeable rather than resisting her husband in a sexual way. Sanger was not advocating for women's right to sexual expression without fear of pregnancy; rather, she was pushing for a liberal feminist space within patriarchal heterosexual conjugality.

She disagreed with the Gandhian analogy, claiming that sexual expression was a spiritual need rather than an animal one and that the act itself was more important than the childbirth. She stated that he opposed sex love, not sex lust. Gandhi answered that he had the chance to do just that when she asked whether he thought it was possible for two people who were happy and in love to restrict their sexual activity so that it would only happen when they desired to have children. Sanger considered it absurd, like Stopes, to argue that having sex to procreate would be love, while union solely to satisfy one's sexual craving would be desire. Sanger further asked Gandhi whether he meant to suggest that a married couple would only have sex three or four times in their lives. In response, Gandhi questioned why people weren't taught that having more than three or four children was immoral and that couples should stop sleeping together after having so many children (Weber 2011, p. 373). This would become a custom if married couples were trained in it. And why did social reformers fail to enact legislation if they were unable to convince the public of this position? If a married couple had four children, they would have experienced enough pleasure from sexual relations. Then, their love could reach a new height.

They have made physical contact. After they had the desired offspring, their love blossomed into a spiritual bond.

Gandhi further opined that something that was uplifting spiritually might be open out. How could something that was inclined to debase itself become widespread? If one could have sex without needing to procreate, then everyone would be happy. Thus, like pharmaceuticals, the instruments for attaining this artificial kind of birth control were proliferating. The only thing to lament is that morally abhorrent behaviour was being perceived as morally right. After a lengthy philosophical digression, Sanger, asked Gandhi for practical advice on how to handle the issue of women becoming consecutively pregnant, at the end of the interview. In response, he suggested limiting sexual union to the menstrual cycle's safe window, which was approximately ten (10) days for the entire menstrual month. That necessitated, at the very least, exercising some self-control during the menstrual cycle month's rest dangerous phase, when there is a significant chance of becoming pregnant<sup>9</sup>. Sanger claims that those present at the interview stated that Gandhi assured her that the intellectual exchange had not been in vain and offered concessions he had never made before. There is no doubt that Gandhi and Sanger had become closer, sensibly (Cullen-DuPont 1999, p. 471).

Continuing the decluttering of dominant western concept of birth control, Gandhi developed a counterargument in opposition to the idea that birth control was required for India due to population growth, stating that the claim was unproven. He believed that this nation could sustain twice as many people as it did then, with a good land system, improved agriculture, and supplemental industries, supporting the idea of distributive justice (Gandhi 1928, p. 44). Gandhi viewed the use of contraceptives as a symptom of modern civilization's overindulgence, which he believed weakened both body and mind. He argued that indulging in sensual pleasures eroded self-control, making individuals effeminate (Gandhi 1909, p. 54). Gandhi criticized the views of birth control advocates like Sanger and Stopes as being based on superstition rather than scientific understanding of human nature (Ahluwalia 2010, pp. 78-9).



### **Conclusion:**

The complex and contradictory nature of the birth control debate in colonial India was exemplified by the historical exchanges between figures like Margaret Sanger, Edith How-Martyn, Marie Stopes, and Gandhi. These ideologically and culturally divided discussions highlight the importance of intellectual engagement in shaping public discourse and driving social change. Gandhi's strong opposition to artificial contraception, rooted in his beliefs in moral discipline and celibacy, starkly contrasted with the views of Western advocates who promoted birth control as a modern way of women's empowerment and health improvement.

Despite these disagreements, Gandhi's interactions with these activists significantly raised awareness about the birth control issue both in India and globally. These exchanges underscore the crucial role of cross-cultural interactions in developing political and social theory. By analysing these interactions and interviews, this article tried to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical and ideological foundations that influenced the birth control movement in colonial India. It challenged the simplistic dichotomy of Eastern tradition versus Western modernity, revealing a nuanced interplay of ideas that shaped social reform and reproductive health.

Finally, Gandhi's discussions with Western birth control proponents illustrate the power of discourse in effecting societal change. These conversations demonstrate how opposing viewpoints can converge in meaningful dialogue, enhancing our understanding of critical social issues. This article not only tried to elucidate the historical context of birth control in colonial India but also underscores the enduring relevance of these debates to contemporary discussions on gender equality and reproductive rights.

### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> during the American Civil War significantly impacted the policies on abolition and civil rights, reinforcing the Union's commitment to ending slavery.

<sup>2</sup> in 1931 played a crucial role in the progression towards Indian independence, highlighting the power of negotiation and mutual understanding in colonial contexts.

<sup>3</sup> is a theory of "planned breeding" and "racial improvement".

<sup>4</sup> Gandhi predicted the birth control struggle among the early proponents and stated in his writings that the reason people opposed his counsel was because his straightforward approach, abstinence, would hurt birth control clinics and propagandists who would lose their source of income.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Sanger and Mahatma Gandhi came into contact through the establishment of the Bombay Birth Control League in 1924. In response to a communication from the League's Secretary, Gandhi courteously expressed his reservations regarding the promotion of artificial birth control methods. Upon learning of Gandhi's objections, Sanger personally wrote to him, strongly protesting his views. In his reply, Gandhi expressed a desire for further enlightenment on the subject, which indirectly compelled Sanger to plan her first visit to India, despite being heavily influenced by the book *Mother India*.

<sup>6</sup> She attended the 1935 Annual Session of the All-India Women's Conference. Nobel Laurette Rabindranath Tagore, around the same time, extended his full support to Sanger's birth control programme.

<sup>7</sup> Reverend John Haynes Holmes was a leading supporter of Gandhi for America.

<sup>8</sup> The minute-to-minute details of the interview on December 3, 1935, starting at 11:00 AM and lasting till after 3 PM were meticulously noted down by the personal secretary and assistant of Gandhi and Sanger, Mahadev Desai and Anna Jane Philips, respectively. Both Desai and Philips, in their respective reporting, majorly represented the side of Gandhi and Sanger, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Gandhi was open about the debate. A month after the report of the interview, his paper *Harijan* carried a rejoinder by Margaret Sanger in its 22 February 1936 issue. See Mahadev Desai, 'Weekly Letter'. There was some debate here about whether Desai had, in fact, gone further than the Mahatma had in the interview on this point. Desai rejected this pointing out that Gandhi was trying to see her point of view.

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## Traditional Leadership Institutions and Governance Styles in Arunachal Pradesh: An Analysis on Contemporary Relevance

Ingo Mitalo & Jayanta Krishna Sarmah

### Abstract

*Before the advent of modern democratic political systems in Arunachal Pradesh, the institution of traditional leadership played a pivotal role in governing village councils, reflecting the traditional political processes and authority of various tribes. Over time, this institution has established itself as a legitimate authority, enduring through various challenges and evolving circumstances. However, as societal dynamics evolved, particularly with the emergence of modernized politico-administrative institutions in the mid-1960s, this traditional leadership institutions faced significant challenges, leading to the emergence of alternative forms of leadership and decision-making. The shifting nature of this institution raises questions about its contemporary significance. Thus, this article seeks to analyze its governance style, roles, and contemporary relevance.*

**Keywords:** Traditional Leadership, Arunachal Pradesh, Tribes, Village Council

### Introduction

As Aristotle and Jowett (1885) remind us, humans are inherently ‘social and political creatures’ (p. 320). This is because, in order to meet both material and emotional needs, they must consistently engage with other fellow individuals. As a result, creating and sustaining harmonious living conditions within the community requires ongoing guidance and direction, a role assumed by leaders. Leadership, therefore, represents a multifaceted process aimed at fostering desired interactions among disparate groups, as well as motivating, persuading, inspiring, and guiding in a manner that ensures the accomplishment of societal goals and the attainment of social cohesion (Hans 1969. P. 522). Furthermore, the essence of leadership transcends temporal and cultural boundaries, making it a ubiquitous concept present in diverse societies, spanning the spectrum from traditional to contemporary. Leadership, a dynamic and evolving phenomenon, manifests itself in various forms across different cultures and historical periods. Whether rooted in age-old traditions or shaped by the complexities of the modern world, leadership remains a fundamental and enduring aspect of human social structures. Here, the

institution of traditional leadership is one such form. People identify such forms of leadership by various titles, such as the chief or headmen.

Traditional involves anything valued in accordance with conventions passed down from generation to generation (Lule 1995, p. 188). They are variously referred to as the keepers of long-standing customs and values that are upheld in certain communities from generation to generation, and as such, they serve as a vital conduit for the realization of social and cultural change. In a similar manner, it is argued that every civilization in the world is traditional in the sense that it appreciates and respects the institutions, customs, beliefs, and practices that have been passed down to it from earlier generations (Attipoe 2021, pp. 319-335). Thus, customs, conventions, and traditions continue to be a conventional source of authority. It is fundamentally grounded in tradition and cultural values, wherein leaders receive authority based on established customs and practices (Mawere et al 2022, p. 250). So traditional leadership is any person who, by virtue of his ancestry, occupies a clearly defined leadership position or throne throughout an area; or who has been appointed to such a position in accordance with the region's customs and traditions, real or imagined, and thus has traditional authority over the people of that area; or any person appointed by an instrument or order of government or elected by the community (Keulder 1998, p. 24). Moreover, traditional leadership institution is also a shared responsibility where general will of community prevails. Max Weber views traditional authority through the lens of legitimacy, where acceptance of the right to rule is derived from tradition or custom (Tian 2003, p. 27). Further, they cannot exist in the absence of a distinct territory and a sociopolitical organization over which he exercises governance, power, authority, and influence; and the village is the most common unit of social aggregation in which traditional leaders operate (Chinsinga 2006, pp. 255-274). The institution of traditional leadership is also seen as an embodiment of the general will in traditional societies, and it is commonly represented in a larger body politic known as the village council. They frequently used this council to exercise their authority. Almost all indigenous communities in the state have had their own self-governing institutions since their inception, which are governed by these traditional leaders in accordance with local customs and traditions.

### **Leadership Patterns in Arunachal Pradesh**

In the current study area of Arunachal Pradesh, traditional leadership institutions have evolved from pre-colonial to post-colonial periods. During the pre-colonial period, the hilly tract was completely disconnect from the modern state system, and was isolated from the outside world. These culturally distinct clusters of hill

societies were thus administered by local power structures like clan, kinship, or village council (Modi 2022, p. 234). And the tribesmen that make up this council are regarded as the village's leader or headmen. These leaders retained their traditional character and substantially functioned within their traditional geographic jurisdiction, within their villages or spheres, and beyond, resolving socioeconomic problems through customary laws and traditions (Pandey 1991, p. 76). Their authority traces back to ancient times, embodying the manifestation of the collective will and strength of respective communities. They are held in high esteem as guardians of customs, culture, and traditional practices, including rituals. It is also noted that traditional leaders generally serves with the people's consent and support, as well as decisions are made often in the council with general unanimity.

However, during the British rule, the traditional leadership system underwent a significant changes, substituting it with formally recognized institutions with various titles such as Gaon Burah (Village headmen), Kotokis (political interpreters), and political Jamadars. This new officially recognized leaders also formally derive their power and authority from colonial government, primarily the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945. This transformation in nomenclature not only reflected a structural shift but also highlighted the colonial administration's concerted efforts to expand colonial state in the hills. Through this, indigenous communities and their traditional governing institutions were therefore transformed into colonial control instruments for the advantage of empires and utilized to carry out colonial rulers' policies (Ray 2003, p. 5). However, colonial state rarely succeeded in completely eliminating old pre-colonial structures. Before the emergence of the contemporary political-administrative system and representative institutions, the postcolonial Indian union substantially depended on this institution for the governance of villages. In fact, the fundamental democratic foundation in the state was super structured upon the village council system, with traditional leaders playing pivotal role. Furthermore, it has been observed that traditional leaders who have survived the colonial and post-colonial periods have maintained their leadership positions through hereditary succession by just changing titles, or vice versa.

Subsequently, various sorts of institutions with varied names exists among communities. Along this, several types of classifications have been provided, mostly based on how authority is exercised in the community. Pandey (2012) categorized them into five types: the Adi community follow a republican democratic model; the Noctes and Wanchos, follow a royal hereditary chieftaincy system; the Idu Mishmis have individualistic leadership tendencies; the Monpa, who follow a theocracy based on monastic authority; and the Apatanis, have

a large village divided into clan segments, which is governed by a clan council (p. 213). Similarly, Verrier Elwin (1965) categorized this traditional institution into mainly three types which are democratic, chieftaincy, and theocratic systems (p. 18).

Though the concept and practice of modern democratic system is new to the state, its tenets may undoubtedly be found among indigenous communities. This is manifested in the local governing styles of communities such as Adi, Galo, and Apatani. For instance, the 'Kebang' (council) of Adi tribes is fundamentally democratic in its functions and structure (Bath 2009, p. 55). It works on the basis of equal participation and consensus among all community members. The council leaders have a responsibility to fulfill effectively the obligations and roles stipulated by the community members. Moreover, in this council, every community members actively engage in discussions and deliberations. Every capable man or woman of age takes part in village council meetings, ensuring thorough deliberation before decisions are reached. The fundamental principle guiding decision-making in these indigenous democracies is 'consensus.' To achieve consensus, village elders persuasively engage with all members. Whether representing clans, sub-clans, or other categories, the selection of council representatives is exclusively through consensus. All representatives in the village council are also chosen through a consensual process. The council arrives at decisions based on the consensus of all present members (Haokip 2022, p. 4).

Furthermore, it is presumed that in political decision-making, leaders align with the desired goals and interests of the represented community, and reciprocally, community members lend their support to these leaders. Notably, certain communities, like the Monpas and Sherdukpens of the Kameng region in the state, have embraced an indigenous system that combines elements of democracy and theocracy. In this system, the leadership institution possesses both religious and political roles. For instance, the Monpas elect a chief called Tsorgen through a democratic process facilitated by the assembly called Tso-Tsangzon. While the structural and functional aspects of this system reflect democratic principles, the chief's authority extends into both the political and religious domains, creating a distinctive blend. The authority of the chief is equated with divine guidance, and disobedience is considered a transgression. In contrast, tribes such as the Khamptis, Singpho, Wancho, Nocte, and Thangsas settled along the Nagaland border in eastern Arunachal Pradesh adhere to a chieftaincy system, embodying a form of royal tradition. Unlike the democratic system, the leadership in the chieftaincy system involves a village chief who typically holds the position for life, and the leadership is based

on hereditary principles. Members of the royal clan often occupy the role of the village chief (Swain 2010, p. 84).

### **Nature of Traditional Leadership Styles**

While the governance structures under which traditional leaders function in the state varies by communities, they do have several qualities that are common to many tribal communities. Given the state's socio-cultural and geographical legacies and diversities, it was not feasible to have a single system governing entire communities. As a result, multiple centers of authority could be located in the state. Firstly, clan or sub-clan has been a very important element in organizing or reorganizing the tribal polity. These traditional leaders are also appointed according to custom and traditions of tribes, which are often inherited rather than direct election (Kurebwa 2018, p. 20). Apart from positional institutional leaders, it has been observed that there are other members such as wise elders of village who act as an important component to this system. In terms of jurisdictional authority, they can exercise power within their respective villages or tribe, implying that each community's political outlook was limited to itself. Also such institutions mainly derived authority from the customs, traditions, and spirituality that give them the right to rule. Wealth, heredity, or personality matters in holding position (Miller 1968, pp. 183).

The dynamics of traditional leadership patterns are also intricately linked to the sociopolitical structures that communities have developed over time. It is crucial to note that these patterns are not mutually exclusive; rather, leaders often exhibit a combination of traits. One notable example is found in communities like the Adis or Apatanis, where traditional leadership adopts a democratic approach. Here, leaders actively engage other community members in decision-making processes, placing value on input from common people and fostering a collaborative environment. Within this system, transformative and charismatic leadership often emerges, transcending the boundaries of their respective communities and influencing beyond.

Conversely, in communities that adhere to chieftaincy, styles of leadership tends to be rigid and autocratic. Headmen wield absolute power, making decisions unilaterally and expecting unwavering obedience from their subordinates. This authoritative style contrasts sharply with the democratic approach observed in other communities. Another noteworthy example can be found in among communities with individualistic tendencies, such as the Mishmis, where transactional and laissez-faire approach to leadership prevails. This style involves minimal governance, allowing community members to make independent decisions. This



autonomy reflects a distinct form of leadership that caters to the unique characteristics and values embedded within these particular societies. These diverse traditional leadership patterns highlight the nuanced ways in which communities organize themselves and the varying roles that leaders play within them. It also underscores the importance of understanding the specific cultural and sociopolitical contexts that shape these leadership dynamics.

### **Traditional Leadership: Its Role and Functions**

The traditional leaders serve as a reflection of the collective will and authority of the entire village community, embodying the aspirations of the people. They play a crucial role in maintaining order and decorum within the village council. In overseeing the affairs of the community, they lead and preside over council sessions, with the support of other elder members. It also interprets the laws and customs, and when making decisions, seeks consultation with the community's elders. Typically, the headman's decisions in the council are considered final and are not subject to challenge by other community members. They are responsible for upholding and enforcing customary laws and social norms. In fact laws are initiated by the people, endorsed by the council, and officially proclaimed by the leader. In democratic system, every decision is expected to originate from the community, and the chiefs are obliged to endorse and implement it accordingly.

Further, the leader's role and functions could be categorized into three main dimensions- Judicial, Politico-Administrative, and Developmental. In the realm of justice administration, they are entrusted with promoting an effective, fair, and efficient justice delivery system through traditional courts. This court are crucial because they are closer to communities and use language and procedures that communities are familiar with, as opposed to the formal procedures used by formal courts (Motlhanke 2023, p. 42). Traditional leaders hear all petty cases, both criminal and civil, and settle disputes according to tribe's customary law. For instance, among the Monpa community, a notable practice involves the Tsorgen (headman) and other elders convening to deliberate on matters, ultimately reaching a decision collectively. This decision is then formally documented, bearing the seals of the Tsorgen, council members, involved parties, and witnesses. In the event of dissatisfaction with the Tsorgen's ruling, a dissatisfied party has the option to appeal to a higher court known as She-nyeir. In contrast, in the chieftaincy systems prevalent among tribes like the Nocte, Wanchos, and others in eastern Arunachal, the chief of the community holds the ultimate authority. The decisions made by the chief are considered final in all circumstances.

Furthermore, this authority has received additional legitimate recognition from the colonial state under the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945, which authorized to adjudicate the vast majority of cases, both civil and criminal, under the prevailing traditional codes of the tribal communities (Luthra 2017, p. 19). Traditional leaders have an important role in maintaining harmony, stability, and resolving conflicts. In fact, they are required to uphold law and order in the community, and their interpretation of justice should be impartial, fair, and effective (Dodo 2013, pp. 29-44).

In the realm of politico-administrative responsibilities, the traditional leaders assumes a pivotal role by overseeing crucial decisions related to matters of war and peace, negotiations, and the resolution of disputes with neighboring tribes. Also they are entrusted with the maintenance of law and order within the community and the formulation of policies governing cultural practices, social traditions, and customs. The primary objectives of the headman revolve around fostering effective and efficient village governance, as well as bolstering community security. Moreover, they also serve as a vital intermediary, facilitating communication and collaboration between the government and the villagers. On the development front, the responsibility of the traditional leaders is to provide supervision and guidance in close coordination with administration and panchayat leaders in developmental activities such as constructing community centers, water supply and sanitation, maintenance of paths and bridges, regulating agriculture and hunting practices and observance of rituals and festivals in the village. At times village is affected by natural calamities like flood, fire etc. all the villagers under the leadership of their village council organize rescue and relief operation (Pandey et al 1999, p. 8). Moreover, the leaders serve a significant religious role in various tribes. A case in point is the Mompa tribe, where the Tsorgen hold a crucial position in their religious ceremonies.

### **Traditional-Modern Dichotomy**

Two schools of thoughts, traditionalists and modernists have divergent perspectives on the role and relevance of traditional leadership institutions in today's dominant liberal democratic landscape. Proponents of modernists described it as the impending modern liberal democratic principles, which are also an impediment to equal development and a just society (Mamdani 1996 and Logan 2009). However, traditionalists (Mazrui 2002; Ayittey 2006 and Koenane 2012) maintain that the institution is legitimate and more democratic than the modern political order. Traditionalists further argue that the institution can still play an important role. In fact they argue that the institution of traditional leadership is compatible with modern democracy because it has democratic characteristics. Also, the modern democratic governance system and ancient leadership

institutions can be integrated (Koenane 2018, pp. 58-71). Undoubtedly, the traditional leadership institutions have been shaped by historical and cultural contexts, often emphasizing hierarchical structures and authority. However, certain aspects of traditional leadership still hold relevance in contemporary contexts.

In the state, prior to the advent of modern democratic governance system, traditional leadership institutions was a time tested institution who unlike modern state systems, drew their authority and legitimacy from unwritten customs and practices that played an important role in sustaining corporate life at the village level. However, since it's exposure to constitutional democratic system, the state's socio-political system has changed and modern democratic structures and institutions introduced in 1960s, particularly Panchayat raj at the village level, have largely undermined traditional leadership, affecting their authority and functioning. They are seen as incompatible with the modern imperatives of democratic system. Moreover, with the state assuming the politico-administrative and judicial responsibilities once held by village council heads, their position has been considerably weakened.

However, in a transitioning society such as Arunachal Pradesh, where the political culture is still tribe oriented, the significance of traditional leadership cannot be undermined. In fact, these institutions remain very important in organizing the life of the people at the local level despite modern state structure. One notable aspect of the enduring relevance of traditional leadership lies in its role in resolving disputes at the village level. Traditional leaders continue to play a crucial part in mediating and delivering justice when conflicts arise within the community. In remote areas where modern legal services are not easily accessible, these traditional leaders persist in administering justice to address both civil and criminal disputes. They provide swift, affordable, and immediate resolution though critical it may be. A compelling example can be observed among the Idu Mishmi tribe, where the Abbeya (leader/negotiator) is approached whenever disagreements arise between parties. The Abbeya listens to both sides, reflects on the situation, negotiates, and arrives at a fair and customary resolution that is mutually binding for the parties involved. In making decisions that demand objectivity, consultation with other elderly members is also a common practice. Further, looking through the socio-cultural perspectives, traditional leadership plays a crucial role as the custodian of local customs, traditions, and spiritual values, providing continuous guidance to their communities throughout generations (Chigwata 2016, p. 69). They are also seen as actors and embodiments of customary decision-making institutions (Blom 2001, p. 54). Beside, traditional leaders often possess a wealth of experience and wisdom accumulated over the years. In certain situations, this expertise can be invaluable, where a deep understanding of the past is crucial.

Moreover, it has been observed that traditional leadership is instrumental in linking connections and collaboration between communities and government, contributing to the preservation of harmony and the realization of developmental objectives in village. They additionally contribute to the success of specific modernization initiatives by acting as translators, interpreters, and government mediators. Therefore, in this context traditional leadership institutions give a syncretistic form that is neither traditionalism nor modernism, but rather a reconciliation and synergy of the two extremes. Finally, traditional leaders are critical to the operation of grassroots democracy at the village level. Despite the absence of the modern democratic system, democratic culture has existed since time immemorial. The workings of various traditional village councils, particularly the Kebang of Adis and Tsorgen of Monpas, demonstrated that they were essentially democratic in function and structure (Bath 2004, p. 5531). As a result, this institution instills democratic values and traditions in the system. Significantly, this institution served as a sub-structure for the subsequent implementation of the superstructure statutory Panchayati Raj system (1967) in the erstwhile North Eastern Frontier Agency. In fact, it has been observed that these traditional authorities in rural areas survived in modern times by morphing into local political leaders, if not elites.

## **Conclusion**

Traditional leadership institutions are a tried-and-true source of authority that once held the most esteemed positions in the villages. They were instrumental in bringing about social change and have established themselves as effective village authorities. It stood for preserving the tribe's history and culture and promoting wellbeing for all. However, with the emergence of modernized politico-administrative structures and institutions in the state in 1960s, traditional leadership has been significantly undermined and to extend irrelevant. In this regard, the implementation of modern democratic systems such as statutory Panchayat raj, followed by the emergence of party politics, has resulted in the replacement of traditional leaders with democratically elected leaders. Subsequently, with the introduction of electoral politics in the state, traditional leaders were able to acquire modern democratic culture and values. The election system has also made them dependent on the support and approval of the people in the village, and it has encouraged the leadership to continually sustain and mobilize the support base. Because of it, there has been a significant change in the village leaders' outlook from a traditional, limited community perspective to a modern one with a pan-Arunachal Identity. Nevertheless, despite traditional leadership institutions relinquishing their typical political

authority, they still hold considerable cultural and social respect. These revered institutions persist as crucial touchstones for upcoming generations.

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## Encoded Icons of Subordination and Silence in Select Malayalam Soap Operas: A Critical Decoding

Priya Jose K

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### Abstract

*The media's portrayal of cultural landscapes reflects an intricate interplay of market forces, identity, power, and representation. Among the various knowledge transfer strategies, television plays a significant role as a medium of popular culture. It is reckoned as an agent of cultural appropriation and change. It has allowed the national and the international to enter private spaces. With the advent of OTT telecasts, its reach and the psychological impressions generated have scaled new dimensions. Due to the intimate interactions of the television industry, viewers are greatly compelled to interpret programmes and, in the process, perform, explain, and contain their lives within the discursive arena enforced by the televised world. This paper borrows ideas from Roland Barthes, John Fiske, Horace Newcomb, Paul Hirsch, and others for a critical analysis. It positions prime-time Malayalam serials to highlight the duality in juxtaposing socially mobile urban women against traditional, docile, and oppressed female characters. Do soaps perpetuate female silence and subordination within broader cultural narratives? Is there an alternative way to read them? The paper finds serialised Malayalam soap blockbusters largely detrimental to women's empowerment. At the same time, a few codes emancipative to women can be decoded through a shift to an interpretive position as suggested by Stuart Hall.*

Keywords: Malayalam Soap Operas, Television Studies, Icon, Encoding, Decoding

Television is a cultural icon in a state of flux and can sway cultural thoughts and behaviour. As debated by Elihu Katz, television viewership is today expropriated as a medium “for configuring national identity, either in state-owned (China, India), commercial (Puerto Rico), or indigenous systems (Australia)” (Osorio 2001, 2). Families worldwide spend a significant amount of time watching television, a behaviour that has undergone considerable changes during the pandemic. Katz’s study in the *International Encyclopaedia of Communications* mentions the popular belief that television (and other mass media) is an integral part of folk knowledge. He also observes that it has the power to influence individual behaviour (Osorio 2001, 5).



The television industry has the freedom to enter domestic familial spaces twenty-four hours a day. “Culture is the generation and circulation of meanings and pleasures within a society, and television is a bearer and provoker of meanings and pleasures in that society” (Chen 1). Undeniably traditional and modern identities are challenged and revamped through television narratives. The viewers are found to involuntarily consume, interpret, appropriate, resist, or negotiate narratives broadcasted. This generates systems of knowledge that play a huge role in negotiating cultural perspectives.

*The Hindu Business Line* of March 12, 2019, reported that The Indian Media and Entertainment (M&E) sector is growing at an annual rate of 11.6%. It crossed ₹2.35 trillion (\$33.6 billion) in 2021. Statistics reveal: “Total television screens (linear and bi-directional) are expected to reach 206 million by 2025 ... hence television revenues will overall continue to grow to INR796 billion by 2025” (FICCI 2023, 26). With numbers as big as this it is imperative that serious theoretical analysis has to be undertaken. In the first two decades of this century, movies have undergone a sea change in subject matter and execution but unfortunately, this cannot be said in the case of television. Until recently television viewership has not received the critical attention it deserves as a medium of social change. “Television criticism, particularly that which looks at daytime programmes like the soaps, has begun to look at how audiences use television to create meanings for themselves and how audiences generate their own cultural capital from programmes actually designed to create potential consumers for advertiser's products” (Brown 1987, 2). In her essay “National Texts and Gendered Lives” Purnima Mankekar discusses how soaps are state-sponsored entertainment segments through which concepts about Indian men and women are dissected and reshaped. Christa Salamandra also highlights the influence of television narratives on viewers' self-perception and the adaptation of global cultural forms for specific cultural purposes. Additionally, Harriet Lyons emphasises that audiences actively engage with television images, interpreting them based on their own lives and prevailing beliefs.

Prime time soaps enjoy the largest viewership worldwide and is no different in India. Soaps were designed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to sell products to women who were homemakers. Soap was the most common commodity advertised, hence the genre's name. Soap opera is an enterprise motivated by capitalistic ideals. It places profit over aesthetics and avoids offending the viewer/consumer. Though women are still the main consumers of soaps worldwide, other family members are also drawn into the discursive field because all television programmes are connected and behave in an episodic manner. The time allotted to advertisement attests to how serials still sell products. An analysis of its narrative form reveals a:

break with classical narrative form. It refuses closure, contains non-hierarchical and multiple plots and characters, and features a point of view balanced between unproblematic perspectives on female cultural existence—competent women, 'sensitive' men—and the traditional problems of women living within patriarchy like social rules governing sexual conduct. (Brown 1987, 1)

A strong socio-political subtext guides the narrative tone and texture. Ideas debated in modern Indian society, like the extent of patriarchal control, adherence to cultural traditions, dowry system, and expectations regarding chastity, fertility, virginity, etc are tested through these plots. The narratives are fragmented and repetitive, with multiple plots. Characters constantly revisit storylines, and some shows offer episode summaries. According to Fiske, this genre presents a “triangular relationship between producer, text, and audience, which makes a television or movie text intertextually meaningful to audiences” (quoted in Chen 4). The television industry functions as a tradition builder worldwide, an act necessitated by the global market. Images, themes, and morality codes propagated are similar and consumeristic in agenda. Hence the relevance of this discursive analysis of Malayalam soaps.

The paper looks into the role of Malayalam serials in customising the idea of a modern Malayali woman and traditional family norms. The serials specifically considered are *Vanambadi* (The Nightingale), *Amma Ariyathe* (Unknown to the Mother), *Kasthooriman* (Musk Deer), *Patharamattu* (Pure Gold), and *Santhvanam* (Compassion) all aired on *Asianet*. This paper only considers Malayalam serials due to the limited scope of the study. However, the arguments are equally applicable to serials in other languages, as they present a similar plotline while adding regional flavours to localise the content. Taken as representative samples is the Malayalam serial *Vanambadi* which appears as *Potol Kumar Ganwala* in Bengali and *Kulfi Kumar Bajewala* in Hindi. According to Newcomb and Hirsch, a cultural analysis will be “the bridge between a concern for television as a communications medium, central to contemporary society, and television as an aesthetic object, the expressive medium that, through its storytelling functions, unites and examines a culture” (Newcomb 1983, 503). These soap operas are constructed using specific codes and conventions that shape their narratives, characters, and themes. The description of gender roles and societal norms within these serials is not monolithic, but a complex interplay of various factors. Soap operas encode messages, and audiences decode them variedly for meaning production. Stuart Hall in the essay, “Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse” suggests “the interpretation may be dominating accepting the prevailing ideological structure. It may be oppositional rejecting the basic aspect of the structure. Or it may be negotiated, creating a sort of personal synthesis” (Newcomb 1994, 569). Dominant messages

“embedded in the pleasant disguise of fictional entertainments” are based on reference or professional codes (Newcomb 1983, 562). It is now easy to identify encoded dominant ideologies since they are structured and have been under critical lens for long. For example, sindoor and thali (wedding chain) encode dominant patriarchal ideologies. The oppositional position is where the cultural experiences and values of the viewers are found contradictory to the incidents portrayed in the reel. Review, gossip, and debates regarding televised material can be considered an oppositional position. The third position allows a more negotiated application to local conditions and creates a corporate position suitable to one's milieu. This opens new understandings and cultural patterns. This position examines how the contradictions in oppositional positions can be resolved.

An article published in *Hindu Business Line* on June 23, 2011, sported the title ‘Soap is Queen in Kerala’ attesting to its popularity. *Stree*, directed by Shyam Sunder, broadcast on *Asianet* from 1998- 2000 was the first mega serial in Malayalam. It was the most-watched in those days and its success primarily depended on its melodramatic and sentimental content. The heroine embodies the traditional Malayali woman, epitomising the 'male ideal'—soft-spoken, submissive, obedient, and chaste, dressed modestly in a saree. In contrast, the anti-heroine often wears tomboyish and garish clothes. Despite being educated, intelligent, and proud, the heroine willingly accepts exploitation and refrains from fighting for her rights as a wife, believing she is duty-bound to obey her husband. The paper reads there has been little difference in character portrayal since the first mega serial. In the popular serials aired across the nation, the male characters uphold collectivity indicating protection of family and community whereas female characters stress morality upholding virtues such as honesty, compassion, and sacrifice. Secondary characters are allowed to disregard the above-mentioned ideas and are later corrected giving these serialised lives a didactic value. Sibling rivalry, jealousy, unrest in the joint family system, scheming matriarchs, estranged mother and daughter, rape, illicit children, scheming half-sisters, jealousy, deceit, egoistic elderly grandparent, etc are the repetitive catalysts that add flesh to the plots. Is there anything new, modern, or trendy to imbibe from these soaps? Is it possible to have a shift in meaning production through a shift from an oppositional position to an interpretive position?

The paper proceeds to recap the plot line of the select serials. *Vanambadi* or The Nightingale was aired between 2017 and 2020 and was on the top branches of the audience's popularity all three years. Emotionally charged and musically driven the series stood apart because the female protagonist Nandini, cheated and abandoned while pregnant appears only in flashbacks. She dies in a car accident when Anumol is only seven or eight. The series hangs on the question of whether the central character Mohan Kumar, the

lover of Nandini, will recognise his biological daughter Anumol. Meanwhile, Mohan marries Padmini from an affluent family and they have a child Thampuru. Except for Padmini and Thampuru, all are fond of Anu for her musical talent, inherited from her father. The series ends, as guilt-ridden Padmini realises her mistakes and leaves the house after asking Anu's forgiveness. Mohan, Thampuru, and Anu wait in the hope that she will return soon. *Amma Ariyathe* or Unknown to the Mother (2020 to 2023) is a recent serial featuring two leading ladies, Neeraja, a successful novelist, and Aleena, her daughter born out of wedlock, who is hell-bent on taking revenge on her mother for abandoning her mercilessly. The plot also portrays Neeraja's mother, an erstwhile Mayor who seems to have a lot of skeletons in her closet. The plot is very complex with a lot of characters and subplots. Aleena's attempts to find her mother's rapists earn her a lot of enemies and her marriage is also jeopardised. The husband as usual is ignorant of all the drama that surrounds his wife and daughter. Another sample taken for the study is *Santhvanam*, which means compassion in English. The episodes revolve around Devi, an epitome of goodness and the backbone of her joint family. She manages the finances and emotions of the family. She takes care of her wheelchair-bound mother-in-law and her husband's younger siblings, including a baby. With the arrival of new daughters-in-law, the power structures shift. Unfortunately, other characters look down on her because she has no children. Later in the story, it is discovered that Devi's husband denied her motherhood because he feared that her devotion to his brothers would lessen if she had a child of her own.

*Patharamattu* (Pure Gold) currently on air is the story of a businessman Adarsh who gets married to the penniless Nayana the heroine through the machinations of her greedy mother. The sole aim in Kanakadurga's life is to have her three daughters married off by hook or crook. Though the marriage is exposed at the outset the relationship has to be worked upon employing the holy status of marriage. Nayana has all the good qualities (hence the titular reference) that please her husband's grandfather and make her the enemy of her mother-in-law who would go to any length to annul the marriage. *Kasthooriman* (The Musk Deer) aired between 2017-2021 was another long-running serial the name of which evokes qualities of the rare and the precious. The first session of the series was based on the famous novel *Sense and Sensibility*, where a widowed mother tries to marry her four daughters to 'respectable' suitors. Misunderstandings between lovers, deceit, jealousy, sacrifice, etc all add to the main plot. After many trials and persecutions, Jeeva and Kavya are united. In the second season, the twin protagonists Diya and Riya are separated at birth and live with one of their now separated parents Jeeva and Kavya. They are blissfully ignorant of the other's existence. The child brought up by the mother grows up to be the epitome of goodness whereas the other brought up by their father, the superstar Jeeva grows up to be a spoilt brat. The

series ends after incidents of kidnapping, rape, a revelation of incest, half-brother rivalry, etc all testing the feminine and motherly qualities of Kavya.

The paper now focuses on elements or areas that are open to decoding during the broadcast of these soaps. Kerala is a land that prides itself on its high literacy rates and progressive youth population. Paradoxically it is also a fertile land for televised soaps despite the triviality of its themes and derogatory portrayal of women's needs. The most visible encoded icons are the titles. Deer, gold, compassion, mother, and nightingale, are all universal images linked to the female. As discussed by Charles Sanders Peirce icons convey a message through their 'likeness' with the original. In semiotics, an icon is a sign that represents an object, place, or idea. The background in most serials is upper-middle-class, affluent families. A large section of the audience does not belong to this milieu and is fed with an imaginary lifestyle. Nowadays female protagonists are doctors, professors, lawyers, novelists, etc by profession. Ironically these women marry into well-to-do families and then fight for their sanity and rights in the remaining five hundred or more episodes. There is "too much talk, too much emotion, too little action, overdressed, overwrought, too much sex (or romance), too many plots, too many characters, too simple, too little sex, too little social commentary, too ordinary" in soaps (Brown 1987, 1). Even when the themes are ordinary and repetitive compared to films the time allotted by the viewers to watch soaps is larger and is appropriated/understood in private spaces. The samples showcase how the actors are carefully chosen to please female sensibility. The heroes are naïve, forgiving, and have a boyish charm. Characters in soaps never grow old and the milieu is full of secrets and subplots. None notice the extended and unrealistic reel time which is in striking contrast with the real time of the audience. Elements of intrigue keep women glued to their favourite soaps. Viewers follow the daily struggles, activities, weddings, and birthdays of soap characters. They are enthralled by the success of the characters and are saddened by their failures. This places viewers in an unrealistic zone which is detrimental to the overall growth of the female psyche and society.

Women also carry their interest in soaps outside of the home and into the public sphere of the workplace... A missed episode is often the topic of lunchtime conversation among working women ... Because of the longevity of the viewers' associated with the characters and content of soaps, there is also the pleasure involved in familiarity and regularity. Brunsdon (1984) refers to this as 'ritual pleasure' (Brown 1987, 7).

Watching soaps gives women ritualistic pleasure. They watch re-telecasts, recall incidents and characters, and try to debate the rights and wrongs in the plot with other family members (viewers).

It is common to have spoiled kids who are egoistic, troublesome, and schemers if they are brought up by the father or the other woman (official wife through an arranged marriage). Kids born out of wedlock and brought up in poverty always hold the limelight. In the serial *Kasthuriman* Jeeva brings up a spoilt brat whereas the daughter nurtured by Kavya is *sanskari*. The idea that ladies make better parents is reinforced which legitimises the withdrawal of guys from domesticated spaces of childcare and food preparation. Only female children with their problems are featured in the serials as if boys are problem-free. So much for patriarchal oppression? Diya's brother in *Kasthooriman* seems to be a welcome change but the boy is claimed to be an exact duplicate of his perfect little sister. So much so that he lacks a personality of his own. Another fate that befalls men and boys in Malayalam serials. Either you are an out-and-out villain doing unimaginably wicked things or the perfect ideal human in the background who never makes a mark. Unlike films where unwed mothers have no other deliverance but death, in soaps the men are blissfully ignorant of the past of their wives. They even magnanimously forgive to uphold the sanctity of the marriage system. All husbands of villainous female characters are portrayed as not having a will of their own. The father-in-law who wants the son-in-law to join his flourishing family business is painted as an out-and-out villain. Maybe because soaps primarily target women audiences, they are given more reel time and agency. Social choices become faulty or weak because such caricatures are absent in real life.

Dominant women with negative shades are portrayed with arched eyebrows, vocal language, wide eyes, heavy ornaments, garish makeup, vibrant coloured attires, heavy accessories, etc which is a very unrealistic portrayal of the saree or nighty-clad homemaker in real life. With matching accessories and untoward heavy makeup, these female soap characters emerge from the office, bedrooms, kitchen, or toilet with equal composure. The danger of serials validating the sanctity of the joint family system lies in normalising any individuality that the women may have as detrimental to the sacred joint family system. The serial *Santhvanam* is a tug-of-war between the joint and nuclear family system of living. The mortal fear is that the sons may go and join the wives' families. The idea of arranged marriages and consanguineous marriages are advocated to maintain peace inside the family. Outsiders are kept at bay or mistreated. Practices discarded decades ago are revoked and women's gender and social identity are placed in opposition. Married heroines sport big thalis and sindoor, encoded icons that evoke notions of fidelity, purity, ownership, marital vows, etc. Another interesting icon is the saree-clad married woman inside the family. No matter the occasion, they struggle to maintain the Malayali *kulastree* image popularised by the genre. The bar was set in the iconic serial *Kumkumapoovu* (2011- 2014) where the protagonist Jayanthi, a college professor, changed fifteen saris in a single day's shoot. What is with teachers wearing sarees all the time?

How can one always avoid soiled clothes and untidy living rooms? The beautiful, homely, ignorant, docile, sacrificing, image captured in the mega serial *Stree* continues to this day.

Along with this, the icon of a multitasking woman is interwoven into the experiential circle of the audience. Marxism and capitalism collude and ignore the otherwise upheld gender differences. Channels familiarise and project the ideal woman who is a sexual partner, friend, and professional breadwinner, and simultaneously loves and cares for her home. This is also endorsed by popular Malayalam women's magazines like *Vanitha* and *Grihalakshmi*. The modern working woman is also someone to be afraid of because she leads the man working alongside her astray. The men generally appear emotionally stable, while the women are busy scheming complicated plots or riding emotional rollercoasters. Despite opportunities to cater to OTT audiences, subtlety in depicting a heroine or villain is conveniently overlooked in television soaps. The focal point is motherhood, marriage, and career and the only threat to these prospects is that of the husband having an extramarital affair or having to deal with a discontent mother-in-law. These hang over the heads of all leading ladies like Damocles' sword. The centrality of the mother is ascertained or rather the mother is up against the other woman. In the pretext of granting a central position to the mother once again, she is forced to succumb to the pressures of being the ideal nurturer and caregiver. An interesting example is why Aleena of *Amma Ariyathe* is bent on punishing her mother instead of discovering her biological father and bringing him to justice for having done the same crime of neglecting her. The daughter's hatred is fixed on the mother who is just an equal if not lesser party to the crime. The paper reads this as a clever way of holding the woman accountable for nurturing the child whereas the father gets away easily. Marriage and motherhood compel women to take a break from their careers. So, pursuing a career is deemed impractical, ambitious, or unworthy.

In an age where surrogacy, single motherhood, oocyte cryopreservation, transgender identities, etc are discussed television watching Keralites are stuck with outdated content. New-gen ideas find minimum reel space. Has consumerism and capitalism colluded to appropriate meaning production? Is the sole purpose of serials to cater to the fancy of women denied similar agency in real life? Is there a conscious attempt to forge a multitasking identity for the Malayali woman throwing off to the winds the pluralistic reality? Or is it the TRP ratings that act as the villain? The benefits of good storytelling and the aesthetic appeal of serials cannot be overlooked. Through compelling narratives in politics, culture, or soap operas, minds can be opened to new possibilities, facilitating broader perspectives. Only such thoughtful communities can enforce change. The "television medium presents us with a continuous stream of images almost all of which are deeply familiar in structure and form .... It uses codes which are closely related to those by which we

perceive reality itself. It appears to be the natural way of seeing the world" (Fiske 2003, 4). Television has been for long accused of dispersing encoded messages detrimental to individual growth. It homogenises and leaves minimum opportunity for pluralistic ideologies.

How does one counter these subtle encodings and generate meaning suitable to a heterogeneous society? Television texts project both denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meanings are fixed whereas connotative meanings are flexible and hence susceptible to appropriation. To override appropriations and enhance societal skill one has to decipher connotations responsibly. Taking a cue from Stuart Hall's cultural analysis of media communication this paper advocates a negotiated position, especially for women viewers with limited mobility in society. Even when icons or codes encoded in prime-time serials are detrimental to women's empowerment, one can actualise and reinforce positive ideas from a negotiated position. Watching repeat telecasts, gossiping, debating on incidents portrayed, informal discussion, etc, can all be considered part of the oppositional position. A negotiated reading is on the other hand a compromise between dominant and oppositional interpretations, where the audience accepts some of the producer's views but formulates their perspectives on other aspects. Despite all their weakness and subordinated positions, women in current serials project a progressive side too. Informing and sharing details on new job profiles, educational openings, fashion, social etiquettes, and social injustices and betrayals, they encourage and equip the less adapted to face the competitive world better. Among the silenced and subjugated females are voices of glamour, modernity, revolt, and progress. As John Fiske puts it: "Television is not quite a do-it-yourself meaning kit but neither is it a box of ready-made meanings for sale" (Fiske 2013, 56). The encrypted message has to be decoded appropriately for healthy appreciation and understanding.

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## Gender Quotas to empower women: India's tryst with Women's Reservation Bill

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### Abstract

*As the global norm increasingly embraces the political empowerment of women, many nations have enacted gender quotas to enhance female presence in politics. India, after several attempts, successfully implemented reservations for women in its Parliament in 2003. This paper commences with emphasizing the significance of achieving gender equality in political representation and outlines international legal commitments aimed at this objective. The role of 'reservations' as a measure for improving political representation is highlighted by addressing the criticisms that have been levelled against such measures. It then traces the roadmap of the Women's Reservation Bill which culminated with the presidential assent to the act in 2023. The paper identifies the standard explanations behind the failure of the earlier version of the Bill as well as the concerns against the passed Act.*

**Keywords:** gender quotas, representation, gender equality

### Introduction:

*"Women represent half the potential talents and skills of humanity and their under-representation in decision-making is a loss for society as a whole."* – (Athens, 1992).

True democratic governance can be equated with inclusion of women in it. Any divergence from this principle undermines efforts to promote democracy, merely perpetuating the societal and political structures that perpetuate unequal power dynamics between genders. This leads to inequitable social policies and unjust political procedures. Thus, women participation in the political sphere shatters dominance of males in the field and serves as a democratic good (Hassim, 2006, p.171).

However, gender inclusivity in politics continues to be elusive. Women voters have been found to greater than men (Inglehart & Norris, 2003: 318-333). In India, women's participation as voters also increased gradually and an almost equal number of women as men voted in 2019 Lok Sabha election and has been recognised as a "silent revolution of self-empowerment" (Kumar, 2022: 20). While women have gained voting rights in nearly all countries worldwide, only a select few nations see their representation in the primary national legislative body exceed 30 per cent, a threshold often deemed essential for women to wield

significant political influence. As the UN Women, 2019 reported, women accounted for only 24.3 per cent of national parliamentarians which is a meagre increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.

The inadequate representation or under-representation of women in national legislatures could be commonly attributed to systemic gender disparities, leading to the implementation of quotas as a growing measure to address these inequities and assist women in surmounting such obstacles (Murray, 2014: 520-532). Gender quotas, to boost the numbers, are one of the key institutional innovations (Krook, 2009: 12). They are a mode of affirmative action which reverses discrimination with an objective to boost women's participation in politics. They serve as a potent instrument for advancing political parity and unlocking fresh pathways for representation. But mere descriptive representation may not further the cause as other informal norms may counter the positives of gender quotas. Instead, focus must also be on whether such increased representation had any impact on the policy debates, attitude towards female parliamentarians and their recruitment.

For the first time, a bill to reserve seats for women in Parliament was proposed in 1996 as part of the 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill. However, the Bill expired with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. Two years later, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government introduced the Bill in the 12th Lok Sabha in 1998, but it again failed to get support and expired. The bill was later reintroduced in 1992, 2002, and 2003 with little success. Five years later, under Manmohan Singh's UPA government, the measure regained some traction. It was finally passed by the Rajya Sabha but never brought up for debate in the Lok Sabha. After six lost attempts to win legislative approval (between 1996 and 2010), Parliament eventually passed the Women's Reservation Bill on September 21, and it became an Act when it got the President's assent on September 28, 2023. With the presidential assent, the women's reservation became a legislation formally known as the "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023".

### **Gender Equality and Political Representation**

Local government is an essential part of India's three-tier system of government. These institutions are responsible for the administration of villages, towns, cities etc. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were introduced in 1992 to provide "new opportunities for local level planning, effective implementation and monitoring of various social and economic development programmes in the country" (Shanker, 2014: 4). In spite of such reservation, the female representation has remained low which could

be attributed to a number of correlated reasons which requires intersectional studies (Hancock, 2007: 66). But before delving into the question of challenges, it is imperative to look into the arguments for increasing the representation of in elected office. The following four arguments form the crux of these arguments (Phillips, 1998: 228): “women bring different skills to politics and provide role models for future generations; women appeal to justice between sexes; it helps in the representation of particular interests of women in state policy (Sapiro, 1981: 711); and it results in a revitalized democracy that bridges the gap between representation and participation.”

Gender parity, like other spheres, is essential in political representation and the monopoly of men is “patently and grotesquely unfair” because diversity in composition of legislatures will result in enhancement of democracy. But it would be far-fetched assumption that bolstered representation only will better their interests. Hence, a distinction between “descriptive” representative and “substantive” representation has been suggested in relevant literature (Goetz & Hassim, 2003: 5). Descriptive representation in legislative body becomes important for three reasons (Richard & Taylor, 1997: 203): exclusion of groups based on attributes like race or gender deprives society of their talents; denying women access means losing out on 50 per cent of talented individuals; under-represented perspectives diminish public debate, and neglecting their policy priorities leads to unrepresentative governance.

Underlining the notion of substantive representative is an assumption that women’s issues or interests will be acted upon once women are in office. As noted by Jon Lovenduski (1997: 718), that in order to make a difference, “it is necessary for women MPs to have distinct views on women’s issues, to bring a women’s perspective into political decision-making, or to bring a different style and set of role expectations to politics.”

#### International obligations

Political participation is a human right and encompasses “citizens the right to take part, directly or through representatives, in the conduct of public affairs and government, and to vote at genuine periodic elections based on universal suffrage and the secret ballot” (Steiner, 1988: 77). This right is enshrined in major international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Later, it also found a place in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. Article 7 of the Convention imposes an obligation on the state parties to “eliminate discrimination against women not only

by ensuring equal right to vote but also by ensuring that women be eligible to held public office, participate in policy formulation and implementation.”

However, CEDAW's implementation remained gradual until the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1975, which marked a watershed moment in the "global agenda for gender equality." It supported the paradigm shift from "women" to "gender" and acknowledged that the entire social system needed to be re-evaluated. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was supported by everyone at the Conference, was a significant step towards empowering women in the twenty-first century. It set strategic targets for gender equality, such as "enhancing women's access to decision-making roles and boosting their leadership capabilities." In 1995, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set a 30% aim for women's involvement in decision-making. It was also included in MDG Goal 3 and the SDGs' revised Agenda (Target 5.5).

### **Women's political representation in India**

Out of 146 nations covered in the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, India is ranked 127th. According to the survey, India has fewer female ministers than nations like China and Turkey, where the percentage is around 7%. According to the research, India's political empowerment rate has reached a record high of 25.3% since 2006. In the 2019 elections, women made up the largest percentage of those elected to the Lok Sabha to date—less than 15% of the overall membership. In 2022, women made up just 33 out of 237 members (13.9%) in the Upper Chamber, or the indirectly elected Council of States (Women in Parliament, IPU, 2022).

According to a comprehensive map-based report (Women in Parliament, IPU, 2023), India ranks 140th among 186 nations in terms of women's participation in Parliament, with women constituting only 15.1 percent of the Lok Sabha and 13.8 percent of the Rajya Sabha. In the Union Cabinet, India stands at 171st place, with women occupying merely 6.7 percent of Cabinet positions. These figures fall behind those of Asian peers such as Nepal, China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan concerning female parliamentary representation. Additionally, India finds itself in the lowest quartile globally for women's representation, as per the same report.

## **Hindrances to Women Participation in Elections**

Although the Indian Constitution provides universal suffrage, ensuring equal voting rights for men and women, entrenched societal norms, the distinction between private and public spheres, and the dominance of men in political arenas hinder women's ability to freely exercise their voting rights and actively participate in elections. “The lack of critical and quality representation of women in key decision-making positions results in women’s agenda not getting reflected and addressed in public policies and programmes” (Baseline Report, 1998). Women elected representatives focussed on issues of long-term benefits whereas the focus of men was on issues that needed immediate action (NIAS, 2002-03). Absence of reservation for women at the national level supplemented with unwillingness of political parties emerge out as hindrances to women’s representation in elections (Basu, 1992).

## **Quotas as legislative efforts for reservation of seats for women**

It is fundamental for political representation that among the public officials, there is diversity which could be personal and professional, experiences and backgrounds etc., (Robinson, 2010). Gender quotas originated in Norway in the 1970s which were later picked up by other countries, have been seen as one potentially highly effective way of redressing gender imbalance ensuring such diversity. Though India established and retained a democratic form of government but was not successful for this reform of gender quotas which was being undertaken elsewhere. (Randall, 2006: 64).

Representation, both descriptive and symbolic, of women is well documented. Unrepresentative legislatures may contribute to a sense of political alienation which may lead to non-participation in the election process. Gender quotas are effective in representing women’s interests as Mansbridge (2005: 625) claims that female “legislators pay greater attention than their male counterparts to issues such as education and women’s rights”. Few studies also suggest “that descriptive presence of women legislatures increase the odds of issues affecting them being debated by policy-makers” (Kittilson, 2005: 642), and bring diverse perspectives into the debated which, if not given an opportunity, would be invisibles (Piscopo, 2008: 395).

The success of quotas, however, depends on its implementation and several factors contribute to this implementation. The “specifications of the quota provisions including the ranking of candidate on candidate list” and the “enforcement mechanisms in place” (Dahlerup, 2007: 84) and quota size (Wood *et.al*, 2016: 527) are some of these factors.

Arguments against quotas frequently claim that women selected through quotas are less capable than their counterparts chosen solely on merit, and that they unfairly displace qualified men. Yet, Allen *et al* (2016: 155), by analysing British general elections in 1997, challenges these assertions. Their study reveals that quota-appointed women do not face discrimination from voters, possess comparable qualifications to their peers, and are not viewed unfavourably by those who hold influential positions.

Quotas might be perceived as unjust and biased against men, especially by those who adhere to the “traditional liberal concept of equal opportunity.” Proponents of quotas contend that due to historical and ongoing discrimination against women, a fair playing field does not exist, and women are not afforded genuinely equal opportunities. Affirmative action is thus seen as necessary to address systemic obstacles that perpetuate the under-representation of women.

Another argument against these reservations appear in the form that there is dearth of enough “qualified and willing female candidates” (Gray, 2003: 55). The ineffectiveness of supply-side approaches in enhancing women's representation suggests that the underrepresentation of women is not solely due to a shortage of capable and interested female candidates. Instead, demand-side measures, particularly quotas, are necessary to address biases against women. These quotas serve a beneficial purpose by compelling political parties to examine their predominantly male gender composition and discriminatory hiring practices. This scrutiny encourages parties to improve their efforts in seeking out and recruiting women who align with their political ideologies (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005: 30).

### **India's tryst with Women's Reservation Bill**

India has three-tier government elected through a democratic majority voting system. Local governments were originally written in Article 40 of Indian Constitution. The Indian Parliament affirmed the reservation of 33 per cent for women in these local governments. But reservation in the State and national legislature could not be passed after several attempts (Rai, 1999: 92).

The government introduced the Constitution (81<sup>st</sup> Amendment) Bill in 1996 which proposed that 33 per cent seats in the Lower House and the State Assemblies shall be reserved for women. After an inconclusive debate, the Bill was referred to a Joint Select Committee chaired by Gita Mukherjee which committed reported at the end of the year. It recommended passing of the bill but with some notes of dissent and also sought for discussion on sub-quotas in the future. Similar attempts by the subsequent governments also failed to give life to the Bill. Introduction often at the end of session, protests and disruption, adjournment of session emerges as common factors behind the failure to pass these bills.

The reasons behind such vehement and seemingly successful opposition can be cumulated under the following themes (Randall, 2006: 65):

a. **Ill-conceived Bill:** The argument of an ill-conceived has various forms. The proposal received criticism for promoting “ghettoization of women”. The requirement of seat rotation could result in impeding career continuity for elected representatives. The rotation system would diminish accountability, since it will wither away the fear of the electorate’s verdict at the next election. These reservations, when added to the existing, would lead to reservation of nearly half of constituencies.

b. **Caste Conflicts:** Another explanation focuses on the political context of existing cast conflicts over reservation policy. Women’s reservations have been a part of a long tradition where it has been used as an instrument of positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged groups. Thus, this is almost a “first reflex” of social justice policy.

The principle of legislative seat reservation for the SCs and STs was subsequently extended after its introduction in the year 1950. As is observed by Rajunayak and Sunitha (2021): “that even though the tribal women become a part of the power structure at the panchayat level, she never gets a chance in the decision-making process due to the humiliating nature of the dominating case.” The Bill would further ensure 1/3rd of the seats already reserved went to women from these communities. Thus, the caste politicians demanded for a lower percentage of quota or a sub-quota based on specific such as caste or economic conditions. Caste politics, then, clearly posed a major hurdle for the bill.

c. **Insufficient support among women:** Women’s movement in India has undergone several phases and is highly diverse. One stimulus was the 1971 report of Committee on the Status of Women in India, *Towards Equality*, published in 1974. It was a part of a broader trend of radical mobilization associated with the Emergency of 1975 (Kumar, 1999). In response to these movements, the government produced a National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000), recommending reservations for women in all levels of government. Though the *panchayat* reservations were eventually enacted but the same could not happen for the Women’s Reservation Bill. Concern raised were that “such a measure would lead to tokenism, co-opting women rather than providing meaningful change” (Rai, 1999: 88). Moreover, feminists themselves are criticized for elitism, lack of effective contact with grass-roots Indian women, and overdependence for funding and ideology on external donors.

d. **Patriarchy:** One reason for the opposition of such Bill is what we refer to as patriarchy. It could be the “general insecurity of menfolk” which is interested in perpetuating male supremacy. Male parliamentarians are thought to be reluctant to adopt a measure that would threaten their own incumbency. Lack of



preparation of successive governments to override strenuous opposition, fear of alienating members of their own party indicates toward a striking absence of political will.

### **The Women's Reservation Act 2023/ Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023**

The importance of equality as a gauge of societal advancement was stressed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar when he said that "I shall measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." Women's ability to realise substantive equality in India's complex and diverse social fabric has been of concern to advocates for social justice. The Women's Reservation Act, 2023 could be taken as a significant stride toward advancing gender equality and this societal progress.

- a. The proposed legislation aims to reserve approximately "1/3rd of all seats in the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi for women. This reservation also extends to seats designated for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in these legislative bodies."
- b. The implementation of this reservation will commence after the publication of the census subsequent to the enactment of the statute. To put it simply, it is only after the census that the delimitation process will begin to specifically allocate seats for women. Initially set for a duration of 15 years, this reservation will persist until a date determined by a law enacted by Parliament.
- c. As per legislation established by Parliament, seats reserved for women will be subject to rotation after each delimitation process.

### **Issues raised against the bill**

- *Demands for sub-quotas for women from OBCs, minorities*

The bill does not recognise sub-quotas for OBCs and EBCs. Such reservation on specific disadvantages has also received criticism.

- *Bill's dependence on delimitation exercise*

Another critique of the Bill revolves around the necessity of a census and subsequent delimitation process before the bill can be enacted. This exercise involves redrawing territorial constituency boundaries and adjusting seat allocations based on population figures to ensure equitable political representation. However,

this process has been postponed until at least 2026, with the timeline potentially extending further depending on the completion of the national census.

- *Rotating constituencies*

The Bill states that allocation of reserved seats will be done through a rotation system which shall take place after every delimitation exercise. This means that rotation would occur approximately every decade, as delimitation is mandated to coincide with each census, with the next one scheduled for 2026. The rotation of reserved seats might diminish the motivation for MPs to focus on serving their constituencies. It could instil fear of ineligibility of re-election in the subsequent elections from the same constituency. Discontinuing the rotation of constituencies at the panchayat level has been suggested. The study found that nearly 85per cent of women serving were first-time representatives, and only 15per cent were able to seek re-election because their seats were no longer reserved.

- *How are 2008 and 2023 Bills different*

The 2023 Bill diverges from its 2008 predecessor notably by incorporating a delimitation exercise post the first census following enactment. Retaining the sunset provision, it refrains from altering Articles 331 and 333, preserving reservations for the Anglo-Indian community. Additionally, it introduces three new articles: 330A and 332A which propose seat reservations for women in the Lower House and the State Legislative Assemblies, while Article 334A gives a phased withdrawal of this affirmative action after 15 years.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing the underrepresentation of women is pivotal for enhancing the quality of representation for all citizens. Additionally, while there is some debate regarding whether descriptive representation directly translates into substantive representation, extensive evidence indicates that female representatives have a significant role to play in advocating for women's issues and mobilizing support for them. Their presence in legislative bodies also fosters continued engagement of female voters in political processes, ultimately contributing to a more robust democracy.

Quotas constitute an effective means to achieve this objective. Research suggests that quotas can indeed be effective in bolstering female representation, provided they are implemented rigorously. Robust quotas, accompanied by stringent enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non-compliance, including regulations governing candidate ranking, have significantly increased the number of women elected. Conversely, quotas lacking robust enforcement measures and placement mandates are unlikely to fulfil their intended purpose, as political parties may seek to circumvent weaker quota regulations. Consequently,

strong quotas emerge as a potent tool for attaining gender-balanced representation and advancing democracy.

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## A Systematic Review of Smallholder Commercialization in Agriculture

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### Abstract:

*In this article we have tried to furnish a systematic review of various issues and concerns associated with commercialization of agriculture by smallholder farmers in India. During the post-green revolution era, intensive farming replaced agricultural practices in India. Significant improvement in input adoption has been witnessed because of green revolution strategy. Yet, the adoption of such improved and modern inputs has remained limited to a great extent among the smallholder farmers in India. Agricultural census (2015–16) in India shows that although small and marginal farmers possess 47.3% of all arable land, they make up 86% of all farmers. The prevalence of such large numbers of small and marginal farmers poses great challenges for the government to adopt appropriate policies supporting the sustainability and profitability of smallholder farming in India. With an average landholding size of 0.6 hectares, the combined 74.4 million hectares owned by 126 million farmers who are smallholder farmers producing at subsistent level of output due to various factors that prevents the transition to commercialization. Therefore, it is argued that to make agriculture a viable and sustainable business, policymakers must devise policies so as to promote the interest of the small holder farmers.*

*In this context this paper has systematically reviewed the various issues associated with commercialization of smallholder farmers in India. The paper has addressed various issues associated with smallholder commercialization in genera and in India. It examines the various definitions of commercialization and different measures of commercialization of agriculture. Furthermore, it has put forward a detailed discussion on the need of commercialization by smallholder farmer in the context of growing demand for food. The paper also addresses how the process of commercialization can significantly affects food security of the smallholder households along with output and profit. A detailed discussion has been given on the need of*

*commercialization of smallholder farmers in India. Finally, the paper ends with conclusions of the review and directions for policymakers on various dimensions of smallholder farming to be focused on.*

Keywords: Agriculture, Smallholder, Subsistence, Commercialization, Food Security.

### **Introduction:**

Indian agriculture was characterized by extensive agricultural cultivation prior to the green revolution (1965) and intensive cultivation following the green revolution. Following the green revolution, there has been a noticeable increase in the usage of modern inputs. Adoption of High Yielding Variety seeds and modern technologies by smallholder farmers is critical to enhance the output and income. Increasing agricultural production, particularly among subsistence farmers, depends on better farming practices and inputs, such as fertilizers or improved seeds with higher yields. However, smallholder farmers have not embraced modern agricultural inputs at an expected rate.

In India, 86% of total farmers are small and marginal farmers, however they only produce 47% of the total agricultural area according to the agricultural census conducted in 2015–16, while, in Tamil Nadu 93% of the total operational holdings are below 2 hectares, and they manage 62% of all cultivable land GoTN (2022), which reveals the significant disparities that exist in agriculture sector. Smaller marketable surpluses and restricted access to agricultural inputs and markets are linked to smaller land sizes. Verma et al. (2020) is of the opinion that smallholders experience lower rates of technology adoption and market efficiency due to their limited production volumes, inadequate access to input sources, extension services, finance facilities, and output markets, which ultimately lead to lower income levels.

Government of India has introduced various agricultural schemes with the objective of doubling the farmers income (DFI) by 2022. Commercialization of smallholders from subsistence agriculture is the biggest challenge facing the policymakers in India. In light of this, the current paper aims to provide a thorough analysis of agricultural commercialization in general and its implications for Indian agriculture specifically.

### **Definition and measurement of commercialization:**

Traditional and subsistence agriculture can be transformed into commercial through spread of technology (Rostow, 1960, p. 4-16). A farm household dedicated to production of significant amount of cash crop, adopting a greater number of inputs in the field for the cultivation and commercialization and selling surplus amount of crops in the market (Immink and Alarcon , 1993, p. 319-342); Strasberg et al., 1999). Eventually agricultural commercialization has broadened more than just producing and selling cash crops in the market (Von Braun and Kennady, 1994, p. 79-99; Pingali, 1997, p. 628-634). Later, commercialization has transformed into adoption of improved inputs and modern technologies which will reflect in terms of surplus. (Sathyasai and Viswanathan, 1997; Leavy and Poulton, 2007, p. 1-37) has argued that output commercialization occurs outside and implies increasing agricultural output for the market, whereas, factor commercialization occurs on the inside and involves an increased reliance on the purchased inputs and advanced agricultural technologies like seeds, fertilizers, machinery etc. which enhances the output of the farming process. Furthermore, commercialization in agriculture rather than being restricted to cash crops like bamboo, cotton, mushroom etc. only can be extended to food crops like rice, wheat, millet etc. as well (Von Braun and Kennady, 1994; Rosegrant, 1995, p. 171-185; Pingali, 2005). Gebre (2006, p. 3); Mahaliyanaarachchi and Bandara (2006) states that commercialization process involves transition from subsistence farming where the farmer is producing primarily for the purpose of personal consumption to producing surplus goods for sale in the market. In other words, commercialization of subsistence farming requires the farmers to indulge in productivity enhancing practices to gain surplus output over and above their requirement for personal consumption to be sold in the market.

### **Indices in measuring agricultural commercialization:**

Different measures have been developed to measure household-level commercialization of agriculture. Von Braun and Kennady (1994) have developed three measures for the purpose.

The first one can be expressed as follows:

$$\text{Commercialization of Agriculture (Output side)} = \frac{\text{Value of Agricultural sales in markets}}{\text{Agricultural product value}}$$



$$\text{Commercialization of Agriculture (Input side)} = \frac{\text{Value of input acquired from markets}}{\text{Agricultural product value}}$$

Secondly, commercialization of rural economy is given as the proportion of the overall value of agricultural produce divided by the value of goods and services purchased in the market. Thirdly, integration into the cash economy is given by the ratio of the total household income to the value of the products and services purchased with cash.

Degree of commercialization is given by Household Commercialization Index (HCI) as developed by (Govereh et al., 1999; Strasberg et al., 1999) is given below:

$$\text{Household Commercialization Index}_i \left[ \frac{\text{Gross value of crop sale}_{hhi'year j}}{\text{Gross value of all crop production}_{hhi'year j}} * 100 \right]$$

Gabre-Madhin et al. (2007) has used four measures of commercialization. First, the sale-to-output ratio calculates the share of agricultural produces value that comes from a household's entire sales revenue in agriculture. Secondly, total value of sold agricultural output divided by the total revenue from production of agricultural crop is known as the sales-to-income ratio. Thirdly, the ratio of sales and purchases of agricultural crop to the total stock of agricultural crop is used to calculate the household's net and absolute market positions. Lastly, the income diversification approach calculates the share of the total agricultural production for own consumption to the purchased food crop from the market.

Although the larger section of the literature emphasizes on the percentage of resources allotted to the cultivation of food crops or high value crops, however, in the presence of suitable market conditions, commercialization of staple crops can be viable as well. On the basis of review of the extent literature, we can conclude that the value of sold agricultural product or purchased agricultural inputs as a percentage of total agricultural family income is the standard method for assessing the level of smallholder commercialization (Randolph 1992); (VonBraun and Kennedy, 1994).

### **Commercialization and smallholder farmers:**

A process of agricultural transformation known as commercialization of farmers where they transform from producing for own consumption to producing for markets to enhance their income using which they purchase inputs from market for total transformation subsistent to commercial farmer (Jaleta et al., 2009). Agricultural commercialization is often associated with specialization in high-value crop production; however, this need not always be the case. (Pingali et al. 1995, p. 171-185) have categorised the smallholder farmers into subsistence, semi-subsistent and commercial farmers based on their input adoption, choice of crop and income from farm and non-farm source's and suggest that the smallholder farmers commercialize through growth in marketable surplus by the means of either concentrating in a single crop or diversifying into different crops. A complete movement towards cash crop production is not as crucial as the transforming from own consumption to producing for market demand (Pingali et al., 2005). In line with this, Gebre-ab (2006) argued that the most prevalent type of commercialization in agriculture is the cultivation of a marketable excess of staple foods above and beyond their own consumption needs.

A critical issue faced by the smallholders while considering commercialization is whether the available resources at their hand will profitably permit the process in the long run or not (Lerman, 2004, p. 461-479; Pingali et al. 2005). The facilities that farmers have at their disposal greatly influence their choice of crop for production. Institutional innovations like group marketing in this regard can aid to the farmers through reduced costs of accessing the markets (Alam, 2007, p. 195-218).

### **Factors affecting commercialization in Agriculture:**

Gabre (2001) defines commercialization of household-level farming to the transformation of small-scale, subsistence-oriented agricultural practices into more market-oriented and commercially viable activities, which involves transition from producing crops for own consumption to market participation through surplus production. This decision to shift from subsistence to semi-subsistent and to commercialization involves various factors. Subsistence farming by smallholders is characterized by small size of land, monocropping practice, inadequate use of inputs, absence of market knowledge, zero or limited crop rotation etc.

Various studies (Adenuga et al., 2013; Jaleta et al., 2019) revealed that literacy level of household head, farming experience, agro-climatic zone and risk management, input market, social and cultural factor, consumption preference, market opportunity and extent of markets influences the commercialization decision of farm household. Institutional, infrastructural and socio-economic factors significantly influence the decision of the households to produce marketable surplus. Munish Alagh (2014, pp. 60-80) found that small farmers are lacking marketing intelligence where majority of households were receiving information from traders regarding the market and marketed surplus output ratio was found on the lower side because the farmer always insures approximately 30 percent of their produce for their self-consumption. The varying extent of commercialisation across Indian states is due to differences existing in output price, information on minimum support price, access to regulated markets, access to credit (Chakraborty M, 2021).

Transformation of smallholder subsistence farmers into commercial farmers requires addressing the various issues faced by them and the various constraints at play preventing them from producing surplus output and selling it in the market.

#### **Commercialization and its impact on livelihood:**

In the context of crop commercialization and its impact on livelihood of farmers (Jaleta et al., 2009) argued that smallholder commercialization will push farmers from producing staple crops to high value crops which ensures efficient utilization of his farm resources. This type of specialized production not only raises productivity through increased exposure to new ideas, economies of scale, and learning by doing, but also provides an incentive in the form of higher income.

The impact of agriculture commercialization can be examined from a number of angles. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has undertaken many studies to look into how smallholder farmers' productivity, income, and nutrition are affected by the commercialization of their practices. These studies are spread over many underdeveloped countries. Different case studies from Africa revealed that shift from subsistence to commercialized agriculture through reallocation of resource can result in increased incomes (VonBraun and Kennady, 1994). Empirical studies Kirsten et.al (2012); Tufa et.al (2014, p. 310-319); Gashaw et.al. (2017) revealed smallholder commercialization is a transformation

process of rural development which contribute to the reduction of poverty among the smallholders through increased incomes.

Both positive and negative impact of food crop commercialization on consumption and nutritional balance have been identified in literature. Imminck & Alarcon (1993, p. 319-342) has pointed out that commercialization in smallholder farming refers to the transfer from food crops to cash crops, that is likely to result in less food available for personal use and a greater reliance on local markets. Various studies identified the negative effect of commercialization of smallholders on their consumption and nutrition status which provide credence to this viewpoint. (Dewey, 1981, p.151-187) In this study he revealed that in rural Mexico commercialization meant lower crop diversity and a greater reliance on purchased foods are associated with preschoolers' poorer nutritional status, dietary diversity, and dietary quality. Additionally, the findings of (Randolph 1992) shows that Malawi's commercialization in agriculture had a detrimental effect on children's nutrition. In addition, (Bouis and Haddad, 1990) has argued that increasing income in the farm household is prerequisite for significantly bettering preschoolers' nutrition, but it is by no means adequate and also households with high earnings revealed an expenditure pattern in favour of non-food product.

Several studies reveal favourable relation between smallholder commercialization and food and nutritional security of households. First, it is believed that commercialization will increase household income, enabling access to a wider variety of products and services (such as improved housing, health care, etc.) (Kennedy, 1994a). Second, it is anticipated that commercialization will raise household members' food intake through the relationship between income and consumption, which improves their overall health condition (Kennedy 1994a). Increased household income favours nutritional improvement as it enables access to more food, reduction in workload, improvement in childcare, improved household sanitation and housing environments, reduction in infectious disease etc (Braun, 1994). (Ochieng et al. 2016, p. 458-482) found that commercial farmers have relatively more diverse diet than other farmers due to the fact that they have higher incomes as compared to their non-commercial counterparts which enable them to purchase other foods supplement their production.

### **Constraints of smallholder commercialization**

Sharma et al., (2012) has pointed out that most of the farmers in in South Asia are owing operational holdings below 2 hectares which necessitates the policymakers to investigate the constraints faced by these farmers in the process of commercialization.

Agricultural markets often suffer from operational inefficiencies, poor infrastructure, information asymmetry, underdeveloped and fragmented output markets, limited spread of input markets, acute shortage of post-harvest infrastructure etc. which leads to high volatility in prices of agricultural produces and large losses for the farmers (Chand R, 2012, p. 53-63; Sharma et al., 2012,). Empirical studies in the underdeveloped countries have documented these issues quite well. Post harvest losses constitute about 36% of total maize production in Africa thereby increasing the prices of maize in the market (Tefera, 2012, p. 267-277). Quality deterioration of crops in the absence of efficient post-harvest management systems is frequent (Ahmad, 2015, p. 7-32). Kumar and Kalita (2017, p. 8) have found that around 33% of total food produced is wasted or lost due to technical inefficiencies in post-harvest operations, as much as 50%-60% cereal grain is lost due to such inefficiencies.

Studies specific to India reveals that smaller number of traders, infiltration of traders, inadequate institutional support, poor transportation facility, a greater number of middlemen, lack of storage facility, low bargaining power of smallholder farmers, poor infrastructure facility and lack of market knowledge on demand and price of the produce etc. act as constraints in commercialization of smallholders (Roop Raj, 2018, p. 810-816). Furthermore, information on market and market intelligence has an important role in influencing the farmers whether to participate in the market or not. Mukesh Kumar (2018, p. 22-27) has pointed out that in the absence of market information smallholders failed to decide on what crop to produce, which market to choose for sale, whether to store the output, whether to sale to intermediaries, in the open market or in the regulated markets. Inadequate crop rotation, use of poor quality of seeds, inadequate use of inputs, excessive use of pesticides, lack of technology adoption, poor institutional facilities such as well-developed credit market etc. are some of the other constraints preventing smallholders from commercializing their agriculture.

Since the smallholder farmers produce relative smaller surplus and supply relatively insignificant amount of the total market supply, they lack bargaining power and faces lower prices. To overcome these problems the smallholders can be organised into producers' group so as to strengthen their collective bargaining power, increase their market share and thereby benefit them through commercialization (Sharma et al., 2012, p. 599-608).

### **Smallholder commercialization in India:**

Indian agriculture is characterized by regional and agro-climatic diversity. The nature of agriculture varies across different regions in terms of methods of production, feasibility of production of different crops, availability of well-developed input and output markets, irrigation infrastructure etc. Although smallholder farming is common across the country, the issues faced by the farmers for commercialization are diverse.

To encourage smallholder farmers participation in the market they need to be educated regarding market integration, prices, demand for the produce in the market and competition (Rajendran and Karthikesan, 2014). Manjula (2021, p. 22-26) studied the role of agriculture market for small holder farmers in India and found that when marketing their produce, small holders have limited marketed surplus, little bargaining leverage, and high transaction costs.

Many regional studies Harris (1984, p. 279); Deogharia, (2017, p. 7493-7505); (Dukpa and Ezung, 2021) reveal that marketed and marketable surplus having a direct impact on farm size, income and production and indirect relation with distance and household size of the farmers.

Literature also suggest that absence of efficient input and credit markets prevents farmers' access to costly modern inputs required for commercialization Sharma et al. (2012, p. 599-608); Roop Raj (2018, p. 810-816); M Kumar (2018, p. 22-27). Additionally, lack of adequate market information, underdeveloped and fragmented output markets and acute shortages of post-harvest management of crops leads to high-fluctuation in prices and large losses. Organizing farmers into producers' group to collectively strengthen their bargaining power against the new procurement systems was found to be another constraint.

### **Concluding and Remarks:**

Since 1980s commercialization of smallholder farmers has drawn attention as a means of modernizing agriculture as a result of fast economic growth and urbanization (Pingali 2001, p., 483-502). In addition to that, keeping up with the growing food demand due to rapid population growth necessitated shift from subsistence agriculture to commercialization agriculture with the focus on surplus production for sale in the market. Literature has broadly discussed the various issues associated with smallholder commercialization, which includes the various sustainable strategies required to be adopted to move the smallholders from subsistence farming to viable commercialization practices and also the consequences of such shift to commercialization on consumption and income of the smallholder farmers.

First, commercialization is broad concept which not only incorporates the marketing of surplus agricultural produce in the market, but also the decision of agricultural households in terms of input adoption, market participation, extent of commercialization and they are dependent on outside market for their consumption.

Secondly, Commercialization is generally associated with shift to production of high value cash crops, various studies suggest that smallholder commercialization can take place in different forms, either through specialization in production of a single crop or multiple crops. Authors like (Pingali and Rosegrant ,1995, p. 171-185); (Pingali et al., 2005) have argued that agriculture crop commercialization can take place in the production of staple food crops and need not necessarily be in high value or cash crops.

Thirdly, the decision to shift to commercial agriculture from subsistent is governed by socio-economics, institutional and infrastructural factors. Access to credit market, input market, output market, road infrastructure, adequate post-harvest management facilities, attitude and preference, education and farm training etc. significantly influence the transition to commercial agriculture.

Although, many studies reveal concern over food insecurity of the households that may result from specialized production of a single crop, there exist findings from different countries which revealed that smallholder commercialization can enhance household income and consumption and thus improving nutritional security in the presence of well-functioning markets.

There exist various issues and challenges to transform into commercial farming from subsistence farming. Chand R (2012, pp. 53-63) has pointed out that agricultural markets often suffer from operational inefficiencies, poor infrastructure, information asymmetry, underdeveloped and fragmented output markets, limited spread of input markets, acute shortage of post-harvest infrastructure etc. which leads to high volatility in prices of agricultural produces and large losses for the farmers.

In the Indian context, majority of the farmers, i.e. 86.1 percent of total farmers are small and marginal farmers operating in land size smaller than 2 hectares. To realize the doubling of farmers income goal of the government of India requires strategic transformation of the subsistence farmers into commercial farmers producing marketable surplus. In order to do that the policymakers must address the various issues underlying the continuation of subsistence farming. Farmer producer organization is a welcome step in the direction of transforming these subsistence farmers into commercial farmers by availing them with input facilities and collective bargaining power.

The process of agricultural commercialization of smallholders from subsistence farming should be strategically planned out in the sense that the process of transformation should take into account the region-specific factors and resource availability, institutional framework in existence and market demand. Commercialization process should take place both on input and output side so as to sustain the process and to maintain consistent production of marketable surplus and to generate sustainable income for the farmers. The policymakers while formulating policies should also focus on the aforementioned issues to successfully transform to commercial farming.

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## Climate Resilient Infrastructure: India's Road to Disaster Resilience

Salin C. Simon & Reinhart Philip

### Abstract

*Disasters pose significant challenge to the development of a nation and its impact is severe on low- and middle-income countries. Disaster reconstruction process is time consuming and at the same time expensive and thereby a financial burden to a state. India is among the top three countries with natural disasters and it is predicated that climate related disasters are on the rise in India. To cope up with India's need to become a 10 trillion-dollar economy by 2030, it has to invest significantly on infrastructure, which is vulnerable to the increasing hydro-met disasters. Considering the fact that 75 per cent of the total districts in India are disaster prone, in the absence of climate proofing and disaster resilient infrastructure, there is a chance that the high investment on infrastructure can go in vain and it will systematically collapse the entire economy. On the other hand, disaster resilient infrastructure can generate more employment, boost economic growth together with averting damage and ensuring resilience. The present paper explores the relevance of climate/disaster resilient infrastructure in India, in the wake of the increase in natural disasters.*

Keywords: Disaster, Infrastructure, Climate, Resilience, Vulnerability

### Introduction

Disasters, be it natural or man-made, leads to the abrupt destruction of the normal life of individuals and the community. Together with human causalities, it destroys livelihood, induces displacement and aggravates vulnerability among different sections of the society. Everywhere disasters disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized sections of the society because of the vulnerability of the region where they stay, absence of proper infrastructure and low financial capacity to cope up with the recovery efforts. Besides, aggravating the vulnerability of the socio-economic structure of the communities, disasters of larger scale can even jeopardize the state's social and economic protective mechanisms. Every disaster is the product of hazard, vulnerability and risk and according to the United Nations

office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) *A disaster is a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk.*

Disasters, especially climate related are on the rise and different parts of the world are facing extreme droughts, erratic rainfalls and floods, cloudburst, cyclones, short-tornados, landslides and extreme heat and cold. In proportion to the increase in natural disasters, there is an increase in human casualties, infrastructural damage, displacement and economic loss. According to EM-DAT (2022), the International Disaster Database, that compiles data from various sources like UN agencies, Insurance companies, non-Governmental agencies and research institutions, since 1900, more than 22,000 mass disasters have occurred at the global level. Though the number of casualties vary from year to year, in an average, 45,000 people die annually in various natural disasters (Ritchie and Rosado 2022). In the year 2021 alone, a total of 367 natural disasters occurred globally, affecting 127 countries and regions, which includes floods, storms, earthquakes, wildfires, droughts, landslides, volcanic eruptions and extreme temperatures. Floods forms the highest frequency among the various natural disasters, accounting to about 56 per cent of the total natural disasters in 2021 (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2022). Along with human casualties, disasters create huge financial loss to the individuals and the state. The various disasters in 2021 have affected 104.1676 million people and has caused a direct economic loss of USD 252.138 billion (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2022). Though the number of death toll due to disasters has declined these years, the economic loss due to disasters has increased manifold in the last two three decades. It is estimated that during the period from 1998- 2017 disasters around the world created a financial loss of 2098 US Billion dollars (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disaster 2018). During the same period, US suffered a loss of 944.8 Billion USD, China (492 Billion USD), Japan (376 Billion USD) and India suffered a loss of 79 Billion USD and Thailand 52 Billion USD. Together with pushing 26 million people into poverty every year, disasters cost the global economy a staggering 520 Billion USD (World Bank 2017)

## Climate Resilient Infrastructure

Around the globe, the severity of disasters causes infrastructure damage and it is often the low- and middle-income countries that faces the maximum destruction. The disaster response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction process are quite expensive, which can even threaten the fiscal policy of a nation. Any additional spending for disaster responsive operations will forgo spending with regard to development activities. Disasters are also crisis multipliers, which can create new problems or can exacerbate the existing issues by undermining the socio-economic security of the individual and the community. When countries are forced to rebuild and repair, after a disaster, it compromises with spending on other sectors like health, sanitation, education and other basic needs, forcing the population more vulnerable and less resilient to future disasters.

Disasters like floods wash out roads, railway lines, electric posts, buildings and agricultural fields; landslides wipe out large tract of land including agricultural land and earthquake destroys buildings and major installations. Storms, cloudburst, mudslides and Tsunamis also have the potential to create maximum damage to the infrastructure and the economy. Here lies the importance of disaster resilient infrastructure to avoid repeated investment in infrastructure after every disaster. Climate resilient infrastructure reduces the incidences of hazards turning into disasters around the globe. It is by comprehending the idea of disaster resilient infrastructure and its importance, the government of India with the support of the United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), proposed an agency named the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) that aims to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks (Indian Council of World Affairs 2023). The coalition, headquartered at New Delhi, is a partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and knowledge institutions. Development of resilient infrastructure to respond to the SDGs is the objective of CDRI (Indian Council of World Affairs 2023).

Normally the disaster recovery planning process engages five major goals in the reconstruction activities; planning by more resilient places, socially just, economically vital, eco-friendly and avoiding future disasters (Berke and Campanella 2006, 194). Two major issues need to be addressed while resilience planning, everywhere, which includes a) improper building back in

hazardous areas that impede prospects of pre-disaster planning; b) lack of compact urban structure that could enhance resiliency and one item needs to be given focus which is the involvement of the affected population in planning and reconstruction works. Developing resilient infrastructure leads to the minimizing of the effects of the disasters and facilitates speedy recovery. No doubt, majority of the present infrastructure systems are more vulnerable to disasters and this necessitates the need for resilient infrastructure in the world.

The idea of Resilient Infrastructure provides systemic resilience infrastructure through normative goals and desired outcomes. The major targets of resilience infrastructure are fulfilling the criteria of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015). The basic principles of resilient infrastructure include raising awareness and setting a common understanding of resilient infrastructure, putting resilience as a core value in planning and implementation of infrastructure projects, highlighting disaster mitigation and safety parameters in engineering designs, assisting the public and private sectors in producing risk-informed policy and investment decisions (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015). The principle of resilient infrastructure is mainly targeted at macro level like nation to ensure political accountability of the infrastructure system.

The primary goal of climate-resilient infrastructure is improving the service delivery mechanism, decreasing the casualties and protecting infrastructure from future disasters. Primarily, the climate resilience approach involves transforming the management priorities into adaptive management techniques, improving the structural measures of the government like eco-friendly building codes and resilient climate policies, which include deepening the sewage system and strengthening the drainage system in the urban regions, increasing the height of bridges and observing the environmental governance measures which provide for maintaining the early warning system and prioritizing sustainable development goals in decision making which will provide resilience administrative machinery to the state. Governance challenge is there for ensuring infrastructure resilience which mainly includes understanding the complex interdependencies and vulnerabilities across the system, building partnerships, prioritizing cost-effective resilience measures and creating a multi-sector governance structure (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015).



## India and Disasters

India's geo-climatic conditions and high social-economic disparities makes it more vulnerable to natural disasters. The factors that make India prone to disaster include both natural and human induced ones like adverse geo-climatic conditions, topography, population growth, environmental degradation, industrialization and urbanization, unscientific development (NIDM 2022, 12). Right from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, anthropogenic factors accelerate the intensity and frequency of the disasters, creating heavy death toll and destruction to livelihood, property and economy (NDMD 2012). The geo-tectonic features of the Himalayan region make it susceptible to earthquakes, landslides and water erosion; the river basins are vulnerable to floods and the Himalayan River systems brings floods in the plains of northern India, especially UP, Bihar; the coastal zones and UTs like Andaman, Andhra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry are prone to cyclones and the desert part is vulnerable to drought and famine. When central and northern India are vulnerable to cold waves, states like Punjab, Tripura, Jharkhand, Andhra and Odisha are vulnerable to heat strokes. This makes 27 states and union territories, out of the total 36, disaster prone. The Global Climate Risk Index Report (CRI) which analyses quantified extreme climatic situations by addressing physical fatalities and economic loss in various states around the globe, ranked India as 7<sup>th</sup> in the Climate Risk Index, in the year 2021 (Eckstein, Künzel, and Schäfer 2021).

According to official estimates, almost 58.6 per cent of the land is prone to earthquakes of moderate to very high intensity; over 12 per cent of the land is prone to floods; around 5700 km of the coastline is prone to cyclones and tsunami; 68 per cent of the cultivable area is vulnerable to drought and the hilly regions are susceptible to landslides (NIDM 2022, 1). In the last two decades, India witnessed around 321 natural disasters and nearly 80 thousand lost their life in these disasters. The disasters during the last two decades have affected more than 108 crore population also. When it comes to damage to infrastructure, crops and livelihood, floods are the costliest, accounting to 63 per cent of the damage, followed by cyclones (19%), earthquakes (10%) and droughts (5%) (The Hindu BusinessLine 2020). The Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, report, points out that between 1967 and 2016, around 2,61,779 people lost their life due to natural disasters and the average annual death rate is 5,236; 92,224 were killed from lightning, 44,923 by cold waves, 36,631 heat strokes, 32,213 landslides, 29,897 floods and 25,891 by cyclones (The Hindu BusinessLine 2020). Drought and flood has

accelerated farmer's suicide in India, due to distress and crop damages. Besides affecting human and physical capital, disasters pose a serious threat to the nation's economic development as it worsens the socio-economic conditions of the people, puts fiscal stress on the Central and State governments and affects the GDP growth rate.

According to Inter governmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group Report, India is facing a decrease in seasonal mean rainfall but an increase in mean and extreme rainfall during monsoon. The geographical situation and irregular monsoon season create serious situation in the country, in the form of extreme droughts and floods. According to NIDM data the annual rainfall in the country is 1150 mm but due to tropical storms or depressions, active conditions and monsoon situations annual rainfall increases to more than 2500 mm per annum. Presence of Himalayan glaciers, west coast, Western Ghats, Khasi Hills and Brahmaputra valley and its perineal rivers causes river flood in the major part of the country. Cloud burst is another source of floods in India which has become common in Uttarakhand. The major flood prone areas in the country, according to Central Water Commission are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Assam, and the coastal regions like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and, Kerala and Maharashtra. Continuous floods in this region facilitates sediment deposition and it reduces the flow of river which accelerates flooding and this along with land depressions and low pressure causes repeated flood in these regions (Tripathi 2015, 92)

Experiencing an average of 17 floods in a year, India is the second most affected country with floods. Since 1915 more than 700 flood occurred in Indian states and casualties caused by flood is 1000 per annum. Cumulative economic loss of India in last decade is nearly 2 per cent of the total GDP of India. Since 1953 flood affected 7.21 million hectares of land and more than 3.19 million people were affected by the flood. In recent years metropolitan cities also face repeated and flash floods and the major reasons for repeated floods in metro cities are careless dumping of waste, mismanaged sewer system and poor maintenance (Tripathi 2015, 96). In addition to these tropical cyclones, thunderstorms and cloudburst have flooded cities like what happened in Mumbai (2005, 2017, 2019 and 2021) Chennai (2005), Delhi (2009), Hyderabad (2016), Ahmedabad (2017) and Cochin 2018 (Mathew, Trück, and Sellers 2012, 312). Urban flood in India causes severe infrastructural damage like destruction of roads, telecommunication structures and collapse of sewer system.

Indian sub-continent has witnessed many drastic earthquakes which caused significant number of casualties and damage to physical infrastructure. Since 1935, eight major earthquakes happened in India viz. Bihar-Nepal border in 1988, Uttarkashi in 1991, Killari in 1993, Jabalpur in 1997, Chamoli in 1999, Bhuj in 2001 and Kashmir in 2005 (Jain 1998). In the eight major earthquakes, more than 40,000 fatalities were reported due to the destruction of buildings. The earthquake in Lathur was the deadliest one in India since its independence and it caused a death toll of 8000, leaving another 30,000 as injured. The earthquake that happened at 03:56 am (IST), measuring 6.2 magnitude scale demolished around fifty-two villages (Earthquake Disaster Risk Index Report 2019). Eight years after the Lathur incident another devastating earthquake happened at Bhuj (Gujarat) in 2001, on the 52<sup>nd</sup> Republic Day of India. The earthquake measuring 7.7 magnitude scale killed around 20,000 people leaving more than 1,67,000 as injured. As per a rough estimate, more than one million structures including houses, schools, hospitals, shops, historic building and tourist attractions were destroyed or damaged. Health care facilities were severely affected as two district hospitals and over 1,200 health clinics were destroyed. Same happened with respect to education infrastructure, as over 11,600 schools were destroyed or damaged. The Gujarat Earthquake Recovery programme has estimated a total loss of INR 9,900 crore and INR 10,600 for the reconstruction activities (Earthquake Disaster Risk Index Report 2019)

### **Developing Disaster Resilient Infrastructure in India**

Consecutive disasters in India since 1999, primarily the super cyclone hit in Odisha (1999) and Tsunami in the Indian Ocean (2004) which affected seven states, led to the enactment of the Disaster Management Authority in India, under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister. It was based on the recommendations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARC, the National Disaster Management Authority was constituted on 30th May 2005 by an Executive Order and subsequently, the Disaster Management Act, 2005 was enacted on 23 December 2005 (NDMA 2023). With the Act, disaster management authority at the Centre, State and District level got formalized (Madhanagopal et al. 2023, 135). But the Act did not replace the then existing structures for Disaster Management in India. So, two structures co-exist at present, the NDMA and other authorities at the State and District Level on the one side and the Crisis Management Committee and Nodal Ministers on the other side.

As it is already pointed out, India has been placed in the 7<sup>th</sup> position, when it comes to the Climate Risk Index 2021. The Study of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) reveals that 27 of 36 states and UTs are highly vulnerable to extreme hydro-met disasters; three out of four states in India are extreme event hotspots; 17 out of 20 people in India are vulnerable to extreme hydro-met disasters and 5 out of every 20 Indians are highly vulnerable to hydro-met disasters (Mohanty and Wadhawan 2021). The same study also suggests 45 per cent of Indian districts are susceptible of unsustainable landscape and infrastructure changes due to disasters (Mohanty and Masson 2020). Disasters so far has caused a heavy damage to the country and during the period between 2000 and 2019, the country suffered a loss of 80 billion USD. In 2018 alone, the country lost nearly 37 billion USD, which is almost twice than what it lost between 1998-2017 (UNICEF 2022). Since disasters are predicted to rise, the level of damage will also be rising in relation to the intensity of the hazard and vulnerability of the region and the population.

The impact of disasters on the economy of a country and in the process of development is very clear. When funds get diverted for response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction operations, it affects the other sectors of the economy. The object of India is to become a 10 trillion-dollar economy in the next ten years but the most significant challenge comes in the form of natural disasters. The plan is to invest an amount of more than 1.5 trillion USD in infrastructure (Wadhawan 2021). But considering the fact that 75 per cent of the Indian districts are extreme event hot spots, there is a chance that disasters can systematically collapse the economy, in the absence of effective climate proofing and disaster resilient infrastructure. Infrastructural damage and losses due to extreme weather events in India, in the recent decades, is estimated to be more than 48 billion USD (Wadhawan 2021). Investment in Climate resilient infrastructure will generate more job opportunities and benefit is estimated to be more than 4.2 trillion USD, according to the World Bank (Wadhawan 2021). Resilient infrastructure will avert the damage and improve the recovery of the economy and the societies, leading to resilience and adaptive capacity.

### **Importance of Climate-resilient Infrastructure in India**

In India, the existing infrastructure such as drainage network, irrigation and water supply networks, small-scale drinking water programme, telecommunication infrastructure, public facilities and energy supply infrastructure etc. are planned for community welfare, and not by keeping in mind the threat that disasters pose. Majority of the infrastructural projects in developing countries show unsatisfactory performance due to poor management of waste disposal, breakdown of drainage system due to overflow of rainwater and lack of absorbing capacity, broken roads due to overflow of vehicles and poor and sustainable practice of road construction (Pudyastuti 2017, 5).

In India poor infrastructure facilities are hampering the effective working of government projects even like 'Make in India'. There is an infrastructural deficit and only an infrastructural development can remove the inefficiency, which is inevitable for its economic expansion and long-term economic growth (Dangra 2016). The World bank report indicates that Indian urban infrastructure sector requires a capital investment of 840 USD for the year 2036 and it is estimated to be 1.18 per cent of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India, during these years. A decadal comparison shows that during the period between 2011-2018, India's infrastructural expenditure in the urban sector was only 0.6 per cent of the GDP which is four times less than the estimated per capita estimated needs. (World Bank 2022). With the increase in urban population, the requirements will also increase and by 2036 it is projected that 600 million Indians will live in urban areas. This is no doubt going to be a burden to the already suffocating urban spaces that lacks better housing, sanitation, drainage and transportation facilities (World Bank 2022). Many of the urban centers have already gone out of fresh water, power supply is not reliable, adequate housing facilities are absent, slums are expanding day by day, population is expanding, all increasing the vulnerability of the urban areas to disasters such as floods, cloudburst, cyclones and earthquakes.

The report of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) clearly points to the necessity of resilient infrastructure in India. The report highlights that during the period between 01 January 2022 to 30 September 2022, India experienced extreme weather events on 241 of the 273 days, and this includes heavy rainfall, landslides and cyclones (Pandey and Sengupta 2023). Climate-related disasters are on the rise in India and India is among the top three countries with natural

disasters in the world, the first being USA and second China. The intensity, frequency and duration of climate related disasters are predicted to rise in India. Due to change in climatic pattern and increase in sea temperature cyclones in the Arabian sea region is also expected to increase. In the last 8 years the nation faced around 41 cyclones of which 28 are of severe nature.

As rightly pointed out by the Global Commission of Adaptation in 2019, climate change is hampering the humanity as it creates far reaching impact on people, environment and the economy. Most affected will be the people living in developing countries especially those who live under poverty and other fragile situations. The data is alarming – agricultural production will decline by more than 30 per cent by 2050; 5 billion people will face lack of sufficient water; the rising of sea level and greater storms will force millions of people in coastal areas into displacement and 100 million people in developing countries will be pushed into below poverty line (Global Commission on Adaptation 2019). This include, the case of India too, as the land is vulnerable to climate induced disasters.

## **Conclusion**

India, the seventh largest country in terms of land and the second most populated country in the world is among the top three countries with natural disasters. With a significant per cent of its population as vulnerable to natural disasters of various types, it becomes imperative for the political system to adopt robust disaster resilient mechanism. This is to protect its sizeable population and to ensure that the development process is not affected. Though institutional changes have occurred, available records/reports shows that the land is not prepared for disasters. There occurred a fundamental shift with regard to disaster management in India and the focus has shifted from disaster response to early warning and disaster preparedness. But this alone is not enough as the land is becoming vulnerable to natural disasters, day-in and day out. Infrastructure plays a major role not only in the development process of the country but also in the adaptation and mitigation of disasters. When disasters create maximum damage to the infrastructure, rebuilding the same require heavy investment, which can even destabilize the financial stability of the country. India is a developing country and the nation-building process is still going on. Large tracts of its population are still out of the benefits of good

governance and economic development. Under these conditions, India cannot afford repeated expenditure on infrastructures, after every disaster. The single solution is disaster resilient infrastructure and for that India needs to adopt structural and non-structural measures, which are ecologically sustainable in nature.

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## Impacts of Stone Quarrying on Human Ecosystem: A Study on Golapara Forest Fringe Village, JFB, Purulia District, West Bengal, India.

Samir Pramanik and Bela Das

### Abstract

*Stone quarrying is a significant industrial activity that involves the extraction of rocks and minerals from the Earth's crust to meet the demands of construction, infrastructure development, and various manufacturing processes. While this practice is essential for fulfilling the growing global need for raw materials, it comes with a range of environmental and socio-economic consequences. Present study focuses on the impact of stone quarrying on the human ecosystem, Golapara forest fringe village, JFB, Purulia District. Present study depended on field work, general perceptions, survey and research facility trial and error. Data was examined through satisfied examination, illustrative and inferential investigation, while SPSS was used to make tables, charts, and frequencies. Cross grouping for chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 excusal level for all derivations. Result revels that, Stone quarrying has the potential to disrupt this delicate balance, leading to both immediate and long-term consequences for human health, livelihoods, and overall well-being. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that considers sustainable mining practices, effective environmental regulations, and community engagement to mitigate the adverse effects and promote a harmonious coexistence between human activities and the ecosystem.*

Keywords: Stone Quarrying, Social-Conflict, Tribal People, vulnerability, Human -Ecosystem.

### Introduction

Stone quarrying is a pervasive action that includes the extraction of stones from the world's outside layer for different development and modern purposes. While it contributes fundamentally to financial improvement by giving unrefined substances to framework projects, it additionally accompanies natural and social results that need cautious thought. This conversation will zero in on the presentation of the ecological and social impacts of stone quarrying in Golapara forest fringe village, JFB, Purulia District. Ecological Impacts like Living space Annihilation; stone quarrying frequently prompts the obliteration of regular natural surroundings for plants and creatures. The exhuming system changes the scene, affecting the neighbourhood vegetation. In Golapara forest fringe village, JFB, Purulia District,

where biodiversity might be rich, quarrying can prompt the deficiency of special environments. Soil Disintegration and Corruption; the evacuation of vegetation and the aggravation of soil during quarrying can bring about expanded soil disintegration. This could provoke sedimentation in adjoining water bodies, affecting water quality and upsetting land and water proficient natural frameworks. Air Contamination; quarrying exercises produce residue and particulate matter, adding to air contamination. The fine particles can antagonistically affect respiratory wellbeing for the two people and creatures nearby. In Golapara forest fringe village, JFB, Purulia District, where air quality may currently be a worry, stone quarrying can worsen the issue. Water Contamination; the extraction and handling of stones might include the utilization of synthetic compounds, prompting water contamination. Spillover from quarries can convey dregs and contaminations into neighbouring streams and streams, adversely influencing oceanic life and influencing water quality. Commotion Contamination; quarrying tasks include large equipment, impacting, and transportation exercises, bringing about raised noise levels. This can upset the regular acoustic climate, influencing untamed life and the prosperity of neighbourhood networks in Golapara forest fringe village, JFB, Purulia District. It then, at that point, fundamentally examines the examination discoveries exhibiting what the stone quarrying process has meant for the review region's tribal individuals, driving them further to the edge of vulnerability.

## **Location**

Jamtoria forest beat is the most minimized backwoods zone in the region, arranged in the southern part lining Paschim Medinipur in east and Jharkhand in the south and west. Geologically it is situated in the between 22°50' to 22°56' 0" N and 86°38' 0" E to 86°42' 0" E longitudes covering an area of 2112 Sq.km. Existing in Burdwan Division, the Area is verged on the east by Bankura, Jhargram Locale, on the north by Paschim Bardhaman Region of West Bengal and Dhanbad Area of Jharkhand, on the west by Bokaro, Ramgarh and Ranchi Regions and on the south by Saraikela-Kharsawan and East Singhbhum Locale of Jharkhand. Golaparah quarry site is a Village in Manbazar-II Block in Purulia Locale of West Bengal State, India. It has a place with Burdwan Division. It is found 62 KM towards South from Region base camp Purulia. 4km from manbazar-ii. 209 km from state capital Kolkata. Jamtoria beat incorporate the scope of boro. The village in particular Golapara (Latitude: 22°54'56.49"N Longitude: 86°40'2.43"E) were chosen for concentrate deliberately. Village with high convergence of tribal networks and approach timberland were the essential thought for choice of the Village.

## **Objectives**

To distinguish and examine the effect of stone quarrying on human ecosystem system in the review region.

To reasonable Measures to direct the negative social effects of stone quarrying of the review region.

## **Methodology**

The review uses an overview research and observational exploration approach to gather data on potential natural dangers in the area. Quantitative methodology is used to analyse data in a structured manner, with inferential methods used to determine population characteristics. The study also employs a perception technique to understand the environmental impact of quarrying and stone pounding. The social examination focuses on the ecological and social impacts of unregulated stone quarrying at JFB, Purulia, using subjective methods like deep interviews with locals, quarry workers, government officials, activists, and environmentalists (Hoque et al,2022,31-32).

Primary data and Secondary: The fundamental wellsprings of data because of this study range from all around gathering the neighbourhood unendingly people related with stone quarries to talking government specialists, social and political trailblazers, essential opportunities activists and preservationists. Around 165 respondents were surveyed for Golapara forest fringe village, JFB, Purulia District. The perception of various occasions at the stone quarrying locales is likewise a wellspring of essential information. Information was gathered from the nearby home local area and quarry representatives utilizing open and close-finished questions. The unit of perception and unit of investigation are two types of estimation. Secondary data consolidate government technique chronicles, notification and reports, guidelines and acts, past survey reports, datasets, assessment unendingly reports of overall affiliations and supporter associations for this assessment project (Hoque et al,2022,31-32).

## **Result and discussion**

The impact of stone quarrying on the human ecosystem of tribal villagers is multifaceted and complex, encompassing interconnected social, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions. The Social Effect Appraisal (SEA) review explored the impacts of stone quarrying on the local environment interview strategies. Quarrying and stone crushing adversely influence the climate through pollution, deforestation,

and land debasement. Stone quarrying poses health risks to tribal villagers, including respiratory problems, hearing impairments, and exposure to harmful chemicals (Lad and Samant ,2014, 5667- 5669).

It disrupts traditional livelihoods, leads to economic hardships, and offers limited employment opportunities. Environmental degradation, including loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, and water contamination, threatens indigenous flora and fauna. The destruction of sacred sites and cultural landmarks can erode the identity of indigenous peoples. Social conflicts between villagers and external stakeholders can escalate into legal battles and violence. The psychological impacts of stone quarrying include stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma, leading to feelings of disempowerment and social exclusion. Stone quarrying process: A quarry is where rocks, sand, or minerals are isolated from the world's external layer. It is often used interchangeably with 'mine', but the terms are distinct. Quarrying involves removing hard or delicate rocks from sources for development, with eight steps: planning, eliminating the top layer, drilling openings, transporting materials, processing materials, increasing value, transporting completed items, reusing or reusing items, and storing completed items. Stone smashing is a crucial part of the quarrying process, with steps such as pounding rocks, cutting them, arranging them in transport lines, stacking them, and shipping them across the country.

#### **Effects of stone quarrying on the social system:**

Aside from the ecological impacts, the stone quarries of the JFB significantly affect the social arrangement of this area. The accompanying conversation portrays the impacts of stone quarrying on the social arrangement of the JFB:

The environment of the JFB, Purulia area is in basic condition because of air and commotion contamination from the stone quarries. In any case, quarrying has social, monetary and ecological effects. The excavators have a worry to limit the impacts of quarrying at level best. The organization ought to likewise genuinely screen the activity of the stone quarries. Yet, the ongoing situations of the JFB, Purulia locale region appear to be that the diggers don't follow least wellbeing and security and ecological standards and guidelines during the extraction and pounding of stones around here. There are no less than quarries encompassed by three tribal village in the JFB, Purulia locale. Around 200 tribal individuals of these three have been straightforwardly impacted by quarrying exercises. This over-the-top stone quarrying in the JFB area is going unabated. The neighbourhood individuals have been experiencing air, water and noise contamination for the last many years. Past this, the water of these streams has become contaminated because of removal of misuse of the cursing machines. These basically removed stones are not achievable to use as composite

materials in development as a result of their sizes. Now and again the fundamentally separated enormous stones are utilized on the streams, lakes, haor and coast dike to safeguard the flood. The development area utilizes little size stones or stone chips. For this, separated stones need to pound for changing over into little sizes and chips (Jepchumba, 2020,12-14).

**Job opportunity and Local Economy:** The point of coordinating, working with and assume control over the drive of the quarry area to the representative by the public authority was to set out work freedom, work on the way of life of saving of the specialists and empowers them to change to the next useful areas of the economy like assembling, development, material and others (Bhattacharjee et. el.2018,1051-1053). As expressed in the writing, quarrying as work concentrated work it sets out significant work open doors in numerous nations. Thus, in the review region many individuals were locked in and utilized in quarrying and related exercises to full fill their business needs. From the information investigation, it uncovered that 89.5% of the quarry labourers' respondents as well as 52.35% of the all-out example populace thought about the area as an essential work methodology and 12.74% of the respondents use as a valuable technique to their occupation. from the respondent's reaction it uncovered that the vast majority of the quarry labourers saving ready to save 40% of their month to month pay. As per the respondents, one reason that implement them to participated in quarry works were the saving methodology which the public authority works with the help nearby, thus, the representative has saved great many birds and were empowered to lay out medium level undertakings. Furthermore, from the reaction to the inquiry because they participated in stone quarrying exercises, they declared that neediness as a significant causative component and the majority of them favour participating in it due to getting protection and preferable pay rather over confidential area business and everyday works (Bhattacharjee et. el.2018,1051-1053).

**Change of regular housing illustration of the tribal people:** This investigation discovered that the lodging example of the tribal individuals at JFB has changed significantly somewhat recently. This investigation discovered that adjustment of scene and woods cover is likewise one more reason for change in the lodging example of the tribal individuals. The ancestral people essentially live in the thick woods, sharp reaches and on top of the slant. They by and large live close to nature. For this, they gather their home interestingly expected to safeguard themselves from the attack of beasts, typical customary risks of thick forest areas and considering their social and severe traditions (Hoque et al,2022,31-32). Regardless, changes in scenes, obliteration of boondocks and slants and changes in the environment due to the movement of the stone quarrying process have provoked the difference in the

housing illustration of the ancestral people at the Golapara backwoods periphery town, JFB, Purulia Area.

**Dust contamination:** Influences human, vegetation, and plants. The level of nearness to the quarry locales are immediate linkage with the limits of impacts on the people in question. The residue produced is first from shot openings by utilization of force driven drills. Then impacting, Pulverizing and material transportation are the fundamental wellsprings of air contamination. Dust is one of the most apparent, obtrusive, and possibly the most bothering influence related with quarrying. (Eshiwani, 2007, 48-49). The chopping down of significant trees and the annihilation of the vegetative cover have prompted biological lopsidedness in the quarry regions. Firmly connected with the above influence is the annihilation of rich land. As indicated by certain respondents, their properties were exceptionally fruitful for farming efficiency. In any case, because of the quarry exercises some land inside the local area can never again uphold viable agrarian efficiency. Farmlands that recently upheld horticulture have been obliterated and others utilized as quarrying destinations. Commotion contamination is normal in all quarry locales. This happens from the principal phase of boring to pulverizing. Nonetheless, the impacting step delivers the most elevated level of commotion contamination. The impact of commotion contamination from impacting influences human, creatures and the encompassing structures. Over the top commotion is an inescapable word related danger with numerous unfavourable impacts, including raised circulatory strain, decreased execution, resting trouble, irritating and stress, (Manzoor and Khan, 2020, 70-71)

**Noise contamination:** Stone quarrying involves activities such as blasting, drilling, crushing, and transportation of materials, which generate significant amounts of noise. The operation of heavy machinery and vehicles adds to the noise levels. This constant noise can exceed permissible levels set by regulatory authorities and contribute to noise pollution in the surrounding areas. The commotion levels surpass 65 decibels, outperforming the set level set by the Division of Purulia. It is revealed that the base and most noteworthy commotion level at the stone crushing plants at JFB is 90 DB and 120 DB, independently. The pollution also affects local residents' health (Manzoor and Khan, 2020, 72-73).

**Health problems:** Stone pulverizing causes serious air contamination issues in dynamic mining and squashing locales, labourers are perseveringly presented to huge centralizations of residue, vaporous poisons, elevated degree of commotion and mishaps which continually represent an extreme danger to labourers' life and networks in closeness to tasks. The information on different wellbeing impacts got from

the ongoing overview among the stone pounding labourers and the populace occupying in and around mining destinations is shown. (Gizaw,2020 ,41-44), The overall observations showed that the quarry and crushing activities cause serious health problem which accounts respiratory (45.8%), eye (33.4%), skin (15%) and hearing problem (5.8%). The speculations were exposed to the Chi Square test the P esteem was 0.005 which shows that there is relationship between the quarrying exercises and the soundness of the area inhabitant. The respiratory issues saw in present review were hacking, windedness, chest torment, asthma, bronchitis and so forth. Skin issues incorporate dryness and unpleasantness of skin. The exercises like digging, impacting, dumping, pounding, stacking discharge dust particles of variable sizes into quick air. The specialists are experienced with significant openness to residue and commotion which might prompt appearance of different word related sicknesses in long haul. The most common word related infections among the stone smasher laborers and the encompassing networks are: respiratory, hearing, eye, skin, fever, silicosis, circulatory strain issues and mishaps (Eta, et al, 2019,44-47).

**Displacement of houses:** Displacement caused by stone quarrying can lead to the breakdown of social structures and community ties that are integral to tribal life. Families may be dispersed across different locations, disrupting communal support systems and traditional governance structures. The impact of stone quarrying on the displacement of houses for tribal villagers is multifaceted, encompassing social, economic, cultural, environmental, and health-related consequences. These results provide insights into the distribution of displacement experiences among the surveyed population.

The data indicate a range of experiences with displacement among the surveyed population, with a majority reporting no displacement and smaller proportions experiencing varying degrees of displacement. Only 5.55% of respondents reported experiencing a high level of displacement (Jepchumba, 2020,67-68).

**Conflict arises between quarry company and surrounding villagers:** Results reveals that, Conflict arises between quarry company and surrounding villagers due to boundary issues, loss of tools, farm destruction, noise, dust, cracks, mass wastage, land slide, and rock falling. The data highlights multiple sources of conflict between the Quarry Company and surrounding communities, with dust pollution (40.6%), road blockages (25.45%), noise (23.63%), accidents of animals (7.27%) and blockage of animal pathways (3.03%) being the primary concerns. These conflicts reflect broader issues related to environmental degradation, public health, and community well-being (Jepchumba, 2020,74-75).



### **Measures to Direct the Negative Social Effects of Stone Quarrying**

The review planned to address the negative social and biological effects of stone quarrying in Golapara forest periphery village, JFB, Purulia region. The discoveries uncovered that momentum measures incorporate draining water in abandoned regions, reestablishing quarried regions, tree planting, land recuperation, disposing of waste rocks, not digging excessively profound to decrease creature mishaps, not quarrying close to streams and in woodlands, and holding converses with networks. Nonetheless, some family heads accept that little is being finished to alleviate these effects, with the exception of risky garbage removal. The quarry chief guaranteed that quarry labourers took milk routinely and called for nearby experts when required. The quarry leaders board guaranteed that labourers were paid and health care coverage was given. The quarry labourers proposed reestablishing quarried regions, eliminating waste rocks, utilizing progressed hardware, fencing quarry locales, and laying out settlements a long way from quarrying destinations to restrict clashes. They likewise called for rules to safeguard the climate and society, and preparing occupants on the most proficient method to involve assets for their monetary and social prosperity (Jepchumba, 2020,119-121).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

With everything taken into account, while stone quarrying in Purulia can add to monetary development, it is vital for manage and ease the connected environmental and social impacts mindfully. Viable practices, neighbourhood, and regulatory oversight are fundamental for figure out a concordance between monetary development and natural and social flourishing of some sort. Point of convergence of this study was to break down the regular and social effects of stone quarrying in Golapara woodland periphery town, JFB, Purulia Locale and its impact on the ancestral people remaining in JFB district.

The enveloping area of stone quarrying objections in JFB has been experiencing regular degradation for the last numerous years. Close by environmental risks, this area has furthermore been going through amicable change. The area ancestral people of JFB have been experiencing purposeful and compelling dispossession. Their betel leaf improvement considering the agroforestry practice of ordinary resource the board has also been demolished by unregulated stone quarrying. As betel leaf improvement considering customary resource the leaders is the prime and only job of the ancestral public, consequently, destroying betel leaf gardens pushed these people to leave this district. Subsequently, this locale has been experiencing a social change. Furthermore, the quarrying activities

ought to be worked financially. This consolidates the regular, monetary, and social viewpoints. This examination found that the quarrying area of Golapara backwoods periphery town, JFB, Purulia Locale district needs on monetary angle and excuses regular and social perspectives. For this, it blocks accomplishing the objective of commonsense development. In these conditions, this study proposes the accompanying suggestions:

- I. The public authority shouldn't mull over the continuous speed increment of the country's turn of events. We need money related new development. Infrastructural improvement is the precondition of money related new development. The extraction of stones is imperative for address the troubles of infrastructural improvement and urbanization. Subsequently, the public authority shouldn't stop the extraction of stones. Regardless, this study proposes isolating the stone during the rainstorm through manual quarrying.
2. The public authority should complete the diagram of the stone quarries rapidly to keep the quarrying from the grounds of the forest area division, inclines and hillocks and arable territories.
3. The public authority should blacklist the unlawful movement of stone-beating plants. Stone-crushing plants ought to be set up in an allocated district with the no grumbling assertion from the Part of Environment. The supercritical stone crushing plant should be introduced at the JFB.
- 4.The government ought to make a move against the land snatching by creating fashioned reports at the JFB.
- 5.The orderly and effective ousting of the tribal individuals from their properties by the stone excavators ought to be halted right away.
- 6.To address the effects of stone mining exercises the accompanying under-recorded proposals are recommended:
- 7.Restoration and restoration program ought to be planned and executed from the scratch. Agro ranger service practices and tree establishing in debased quarry mining destinations ought to be empowered. Similarly, natural supportability ought to be given a high need with an end goal to save limited assets for the people in the future. There is need to guarantee that mining tasks are directed so that the more extensive scale advantages to society are transparently recognized and that purposeful endeavours are made to guarantee that these advantages can be supported in any event, while mining exercises have halted.

8. Opening of pits ought to be finished at good ways from networks and conclusion and reclamation guaranteed on ideal premise as this can assist with decreasing the pervasiveness pace of quarrying related mishaps and sicknesses in the networks.

9. Nearby social class should be benefited directly from quarrying opened in their areas through participation of the quarrying works out, selection of objections for the quarrying and recovery programs. This could chip away at their money related occupations and besides work on their obligations towards recuperation of abandoned quarry.

10. Due to its tendency stone, quarrying exercises were presented to mishaps and passings. Absence of mindfulness about security measures against these mishaps and preventable illnesses combined with unfortunate apparatuses endanger the specialists' lives and moreover their occupation. Accordingly, through various partners and the nearby networks, mindfulness missions and refinement gatherings might be coordinated occasionally at the quarry. Quarries should be alarmed about the impacts of their exercises and urged to go to lengths to moderate or decrease the adverse consequences

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## Navigating Identity: Understanding Meitei-Kuki Conflict in Contemporary Manipur

Sanjit Pal

### Abstract

*The contemporary conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur is a classic example of identity politics in multi-ethnic societies. This article delves into the history, socio-economic and political factors behind the conflict to identify its immediate causes and long-standing grievances. A demographic analysis, cultural interaction and recent developments show the close link between the Meitei and Kuki communities in their quest for recognition and resources. The article focuses on three main issues; the impact of the Meitei community's demand to be included within Scheduled Tribe community, inflow of refugees from Myanmar, and government policies on poppy cultivation and forest land eviction. The article is keen on the adoption of a multidimensional approach to peace-building which should involve infrastructure building at the grass-root level, governmental interventions, as well as regional cooperation.*

**Keywords:** Manipur, Meitei-Kuki conflict, identity, multi-ethnic societies, peace-building.

### Introduction:

Ethnic conflict is a common challenge for many countries around the world, varying in nature and severity from region to region. Ethnic conflict in India, especially in the northeastern states, has been going on since the colonial era. The Northeast has seen continuous political, social, and economic unrest, with movements for recognition often escalating into violence. Manipur, a state known for its cultural diversity, is no exception to this trend. Here, inter-ethnic conflicts have been a central focus of socio-political discussions for years. In contemporary Manipur, the Meitei-Kuki conflict serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for identity and territorial rights in a rapidly changing socio-political background. Understanding the difficulties of the Meitei-Kuki conflict needs an examination of various factors such as identity formation, economic inequalities, and political dynamics unique to Manipur.

Manipur, often referred to as “the land of jewels,” (Singh. 1986. 50) is one of the eight states in Northeast India, spanning an area of 22,327 square kilometers and home to a population of 2,721,756.

Geographically, the state is divided into hill and valley areas. The valley, occupying about 10 per cent of the entire terrestrial area with approximately 2,230 square kilometers, is predominantly alluvial and lies at the center of the state. In contrast, the hills cover the majority, around 90 per cent, totaling 20,126 square kilometers (Singh. 1986.50). Manipur, home to an ethnically diverse population, comprises three main communities: the Meitei (including Meitei Pangals or Manipuri Muslims), and the Nagas and Kuki-Chin tribes. In total, there are 35 different tribal communities in Manipur<sup>1</sup>. The hills predominantly house tribal communities, constituting 42.79 per cent of the population, including Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes. In contrast, the valley is primarily occupied by the Meitei and Pangals, making up 57.21 per cent of the population, with followers of Vaishnavite Hinduism and Islam, respectively<sup>2</sup>. Understanding the severity of the recent ethnic conflict in Manipur requires familiarity with the major ethnic groups living in the region.

#### **Meitei Community:**

The Meitei community, which makes up 53 per cent of Manipur's population (Deca 2023.22), lives mainly in the valley and has a long history and unique culture. They used to follow a religion called "Sanamahi" (nature worship), but later they were converted to Hinduism by a king named Meidingu Pamheiba (Roy 1958.44). This king also changed the name of their land from Kangleipak to Manipur (Verghese 1997. 113). Around 8.4 per cent of the Muslim population in Meiteis are referred to as Meiteis Pangals, predominantly settled in various districts of the Imphal valley, including the Jiribam sub-division<sup>3</sup>. Originating from the Sylhet valley in present-day Bangladesh, they trace their roots back to immigrants who intermarried with Manipuri locals, adopting many aspects of the local lifestyle (Singh. 2010.20).

#### **Naga Community:**

The Naga community, one of the largest tribal communities in the Northeast region, holds a significant presence across Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and even extending into Myanmar. The term 'Naga' is a creation of the British, dating from the 1880s. The nomenclature 'is an identity projected for better administrative purposes to club different tribes under one administrative umbrella' (Oinam 2003. 2032). In Manipur, particularly in districts like Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul, numerous Naga sub-tribes are found, each with its distinct cultural identity. As per the 2011



Indian census, they constitute 24 per cent of the total population of Manipur (Deka 2023. 22). Today, the Naga community plays a significant role in the socio-cultural landscape of Manipur, contributing to the diversity and heritage of the region.

### **Kukis Community:**

The Kuki hill tribes trace their roots to 500 BCE (Mercy 2023.18). The term 'Kukis' is used to refer to an ethnic group that is made up of multiple tribes such as Guite, Thadow, Hmar, Paite, and Gangte, among others. Kukis are also called 'Chin-Kuki-Mizo group' and 'Kuki- Chin group' (Haokip 2016.30). Described as a wandering race, their name's origin is speculated to have connections to various sources, such as the Bengali term for a cultivation system called "Kuchis," or the Baluchistan term "Kuchis," which means "Wandering people." (Vaiphei 1995.126). They are the third largest tribal community, making up 16 per cent of Manipur's total population<sup>4</sup>. They predominantly reside in the hill districts of Churachandpur and Sadar Hills Sub-division in Manipur, with smaller communities found in other hill districts (Zou 2018.35). Along with those major groups, there are some other smaller tribes in Manipur, like the Koirao, Chiru, Sema, Angami, and Kharam, The Kharam were formally accepted as a scheduled tribe on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003<sup>5</sup>.

The main ethnic groups in Manipur—Meitei, Nagas, and Kukis—might seem different, but they share similarities in their culture. They all belong to the same Mongoloid group and have similar traditions. However, historical competition over social, political, and economic matters has fuelled ethnic tensions among these groups over time. These tensions trace back to ancient times when waves of migrants flooded in from the east. These conflicts strengthened with British policies, which strategically settled Kuki tribes near Naga settlements to create a buffer zone between them and the Meitei population<sup>6</sup>. Immediately after India's independence, clashes between the Meiteis and Nagas with the Indian state began, but it was the early 1970s that saw a surge in ethnic conflict<sup>7</sup>. The Kuki-Naga clashes during this period resulted in significant loss of life, destruction of homes and villages, and mass displacement among both communities. However, it was in the 1990s that tensions among the Meiteis, Nagas, and Kukis reached a peak, marked by clashes such as the Kuki-Naga conflict in 1992, the Meiteis-Muslim clash in 1993, and the Kuki-Tamil clashes in 1995. Notably, the Kuki-Naga conflict in 1992 alone claimed 230 lives and displaced 100,000 individuals. Moreover, the escalation of the Kuki-Paite clash in 1997 resulted in 352 fatalities and displaced 13,000 people (Deka 2023.24).

Since May 3, 2023<sup>8</sup>, Manipur has experienced ongoing clashes between two local ethnic groups, the Meitei and Kuki communities, which have their origins in deep historical connections. In the past, there was a strong social, cultural, and political bond between the Meeteis and Kukis in Manipur. Historical records, like Cheitharol Kumpaba, mention that many Meitei kings had names in the Kuki dialect. For instance, the name Taothingmang, attributed to King Taothingmang, was a common Kuki name, indicating the close ties between the communities. Moreover, during times of external threat, Meitei kings often turned to the Kukis for assistance in defending their land and sovereignty. For example, during the 'Ava war' in 1810, King Chourjit received support from the Kukis. Similarly, in 1820, Kukis played a crucial role in helping King Herachandra fend off Ava incursions into Manipur, with 500 Kuki warriors volunteering to join the military of the king (Haokip 2008.134). However, this solidarity has eroded over time, particularly with the arrival of separatist elements among the Kukis, such as the claim for a separate Kuki homeland. This demand has intensified tensions and led to ethnic clashes and violence between the two communities. More recently, clashes erupted between Meiteis and Kukis after a tribal solidarity march called by ATSUM ( All India Tribal Students against the Meitei community's claim for Scheduled Tribe status, highlighting the complex ethnic dynamics and the delicate balance of power in Manipur (Mercy 2023.18). These conflicts have led to significant casualties, displacement, and destruction, underscoring the urgent need for reconciliation and peace-building efforts in the region. Government statistics released as of February 28, 2024, report that 219 individuals have lost their lives due to the violence, with an additional 60,000 forced to flee their homes<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, 4,786 residences have been set ablaze, while 386 religious buildings<sup>10</sup>, including temples and churches, have been vandalized. The clashes have reaffirmed and strengthened the longstanding demand by the Kukis for their separate state. Since May 3 of the previous year, when the ethnic conflict erupted, Manipur has seen a series of arms plunder. As per the statement by Manipur's Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in early April, the police have retrieved 1,757 firearms and 22,707 rounds of ammunition out of the roughly 5,600 firearms and 650,000 rounds looted from the Manipur Police arsenal<sup>11</sup> during the initial days of the unrest.

### **Immediate Cause of the Conflict:**

The recent conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur has deep roots in historical enmities as well as present-day socio-political dynamics. Meiteis people have long demand for gaining Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. This aspiration, advocated by the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) since 2012 (Haokip 2015.83), stems from the economic pressures in the valley, which accommodates a dense population in limited land. Meanwhile, the hills, inhabited by Kukis and Nagas, are predominantly forested. However, economic opportunities, particularly in agriculture, are scarce in the valley, with over 42 per cent of households dependent on farming, and 60 per cent being self-employed, surpassing the national average of 54 per cent<sup>12</sup>. This economic squeeze has boosted the Meiteis' demand for ST status, envisioning enhanced access to resources and political representation. However, this demand, previously rejected by both the Union and state governments in 1982 and 2001, respectively, continues to evoke resistance from the Kukis and other tribal groups<sup>13</sup>. Conversely, Kukis, already recognized as Scheduled Tribes (ST), fear potential land acquisition and economic disruptions if the request of the Meiteis is approved. The conflict escalated after a Manipur High Court ruling on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023 favored the Meitei demand, sparking protests and clashes between the two communities. Despite the subsequent intervention from the Supreme Court on May 17, 2023, to stay the Manipur court order, tensions continue. Additionally, hill peoples argue that the Manipur Land Revenue Act of 1960 imposes limitations on non-tribal valley residents regarding land acquisition in the hills (Deka 2023. 25). Therefore, granting tribal status to the Meiteis would allow them to bypass these restrictions, potentially altering the dynamics of land ownership in the region. In this connection, some scholars argue that the reservation initiative aims to dominate mineral-rich hill areas inhabited by Indigenous communities, driven by a strategic design to benefit corporate houses eager to exploit these resources<sup>4</sup>. This perceived state-corporate nexus targets these regions for resource extraction.

### **Influx of People from Myanmar:**

The conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur is not isolated; it is closely linked to the civil unrest in neighboring Myanmar. The border between Manipur and Myanmar extends for 400 kilometers, with the majority of it being porous. Only 10 per cent of the border is fenced off (Nepram 2023.12). There is a system in place that permits residents living within a 16-kilometer radius on either side to travel across for up to three days due to a Free Movement Regime (FMR). People are

talking about more and more unregistered settlers coming into Manipur. This is because of a refugee influx after the military coup in Myanmar in 2021 (Choudhury 2023.14). After the coup, the military in Myanmar started fighting harder against rebel groups in the northwest, causing many people to flee to escape the violence. The influx of Burmese refugees, particularly those with ethnic ties to the Kuki tribe, added a layer of complexity to the conflict. Official estimates of refugees who have crossed the Indo-Myanmar border into Northeast India remain at around 52,000, mostly from the Chin and Sagaing states of the neighboring country. These estimates include around 4,900 refugees and asylum seekers in New Delhi, 39,600 in Mizoram, and 7,800 in Manipur (Nepram 2023.12). In response to concerns over illegal migration, several Meitei organizations in Manipur have called on the government to implement the National Register for Citizens (NRC), a demand also echoed by the Manipuri Nagas. Addressing these demands, Biren Singh announced in March 2023 that the Manipur State Population Commission (MSPC)<sup>8</sup> would conduct a house-to-house survey to identify illegal immigrants, which further aggravated the tension between the Kukis and Meitei communities. Radical Meitei argue that the influx of refugees from Myanmar has caused an unnatural increase in the hill population. As evidence, they point to Census reports from 1971 to 2011. During this period, the percentage of people living in the valley consistently dropped from 67.40 per cent in 1971 to 57.21 per cent in 2011, while the hill population steadily grew from 32.60 per cent in 1971 to 42.79 per cent in 2011<sup>14</sup>.

### **Ban on Poppy Cultivation:**

The ban on poppy cultivation in Manipur, spearheaded by Chief Minister Biren Singh's 'war on drug' trafficking, has also emerged as a significant catalyst for the recent ethnic conflict between the Meiteis and Kuki communities. According to experts, the epicenter of the illegal drug trade, known as the "Golden Triangle," has shifted from the Myanmar-Thailand-Laos tri-junction to the borders of Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>. This shift has prompted the Government of Manipur to initiate a "war on drugs." (Nepram 2023.12) State data between 2017 and 2022 reveal an overwhelming increase in poppy cultivation, with the land under poppy growing nearly threefold from 1,853 acres to 6,743 acres. Manipur ranks among the top five states in India for opioid use, with addiction affecting 10 per cent of its population (Deka 2023.26). As the government cracked down on poppy fields, predominantly situated in Kuki-inhabited areas, suspicions arose within the Kuki community regarding the motives of the present Chief Minister of Manipur, viewing him as inherently anti-Kuki. Furthermore, his statements indirectly implicating Kukis in poppy cultivation intensified tensions, despite acknowledgment that some Meiteis and Nagas also engage in such practices. Meitei civil

society groups, notably the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), further escalated the conflict by labeling Kuki militant groups as “narco-terrorists.” Since 2017, the state government has eradicated almost 15,500 acres of poppy fields, with approximately 85 per cent of this land located in districts predominantly inhabited by the Kuki community, as per official records<sup>15</sup>. This led many Kukis to perceive the government’s actions as selectively targeting their community, further fuelling resentment and distrust.

### **Forest Land Evacuation Initiative:**

The drive of the present government against the illegal encroachment in forest areas further lit a spark the rivalry. The Meitei claim that the Kuki people are not indigenous to Manipur but were resettled in the state by the British from the neighbouring hills of Myanmar during the nineteenth century<sup>6</sup>. The seeds of conflict were sown in August 2015 when the Manipur state government, also led by a Meitei, enacted three controversial laws: the Protection of Manipur People Bill, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (7<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Bill)<sup>16</sup>. which tribal communities saw as favoring the Meitei. These actions were perceived by tribal communities as heavily prejudiced towards the interests of the Meitei population. These laws were perceived as attempts to enable the Meitei to purchase land in the hills and cast doubt on the citizenship of tribal groups. The ensuing demonstrations resulted in the deaths of nine young people from the tribes in Churachandpur, prompting a protest where the Kuki and other tribal groups refused to bury the dead, keeping them in the morgue for two years. Following the ascent of a new state government led by Biren Singh in 2017, an agreement was signed with tribal leaders, under federal government guidance, to restore peace<sup>17</sup>. Having secured a second term, Biren Singh’s government initiated evictions primarily targeting Kuki villagers from houses and villages allegedly built on forest land in violation of the Indian Forest Law. But this move caused more tension between the Meiteis and Kukis. The Kuki, seeing bias from the Meitei chief minister, launched a series of protests, some of which escalated into violence. The renewed clashes have bolstered the enduring call from the Kukis for a separate state of their own.

When the violence began, many noticed that the central government stayed quiet. This drew criticism from opposition parties, who accused the BJP of prioritizing the upcoming elections over addressing the violence and using their silence to allow it to continue. Some Kuki civil society organizations detect a perceived inclination towards Hindutva in the actions of both the state and central government. However, both the governments and Supreme Court have taken different initiatives to control the violence. The central government swiftly responded to the Manipur violence, deploying 124 CAPF

companies and 184 Assam Rifles columns, along with helicopters and drones. Appointing Kuldeep Singh as a security advisor and Vineet Joshi as chief secretary, they ensured essential supplies and held extensive meetings, showcasing commitment to restoring peace<sup>18</sup>. The Central government also appointed a three-member Commission of Inquiry headed by Ajai Lamba, retired Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court, with members Himanshu Shekhar Das and Aloka Prabhakar, to probe the violence and riots targeting different communities<sup>19</sup>. The Supreme Court sought to ensure the availability of critical medical care for those in relief camps and rehabilitative measures for those affected by the ethnic violence. On August 7, a bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud appointed a committee comprising three former women judges: Justice Gita Mittal, former Chief Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court; Justice Shalini Phansalkar Joshi, former judge of the Bombay High Court; and Justice Asha Menon, former judge of the Delhi High Court. The bench instructed the committee to probe the sexual harassment incident that took place on May 4, 2023, and to present their findings within two months. (Venkatesan 2023.21). The Supreme Court further ordered the Manipur government, CBI, and NIA to submit reports on the status of probe and charge sheets, considering whether trials should take place in Assam or Manipur<sup>20</sup>. Despite initiatives ethnic tensions persist, highlighting the urgency for comprehensive solutions.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the resolution of the Meitei-Kuki conflict requires a multidimensional approach that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes peace-building at all levels of society. There is a potential for the recent ethnic conflict to spill over to other communities within the state and beyond its borders, particularly in the neighboring states. If the conflict extends beyond Manipur, its nature will change and draw support from sympathetic groups in these regions. It is crucial to recover the looted weapons through extensive security operations. All parties must prioritize peace and reconciliation, involving local communities and governments. Citizen-focused dialogues and engagement with civil society can build trust and understanding among diverse ethnic groups. Additionally, the media should exercise restraint and maturity in reporting on these events to avoid intensifying tensions.

Further, to address the ongoing ethnic conflict, India should cooperate with the United Nations High Commission (UNHC) to manage the current refugee influx, particularly from Myanmar. This involves

registering refugees and issuing them refugee visas, allowing them the option to either return home or resettle in a safer country. Despite India not being a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention and its protocol, implementing these measures can help alleviate concerns in Manipur and other north-eastern states, ultimately contributing to calming the situation. India's counter-insurgency strategy in the Northeast should focus on cooperation with neighboring countries and robust regional diplomacy to manage cross-border impacts. Moreover, the situation in Myanmar has a direct impact on Manipur, necessitating India's intervention to urge the present military government of Myanmar to stop the civil war and establish a comprehensive refugee management system. Border security forces positioned near the border should enforce the regulations governing the "Free Movement Regime" and oversee tribal movements. Remote areas need improved governance and development, possibly through Autonomous District Councils with financial support. The Act East policy should extend to Northeast development, focusing on connectivity and eco-preservation. Investment in education, eco-friendly industry, and agriculture will boost human development. Poppy cultivation in Manipur's hills should end, with alternatives like poultry farming promoted. The inclusion of Meiteis within the Schedule Tribe status and resolving land disputes needs thorough consideration. For all the ethnic groups to live peacefully and develop economically, they might need to compromise on some things. If they can do this, Manipur could become an important link between India and Southeast Asia.

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## Visionary Tales: The Role of Science Fiction Narratives in Illuminating Social Issues

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### Abstract

*Science fiction has long been recognized as a literary genre that transcends mere entertainment, offering readers and viewers a window into alternative realities and speculative futures. Yet, beyond its capacity to captivate audiences with fantastical worlds and futuristic technologies, science fiction serves a profound purpose: to shed light on pressing social issues of our time. It serves as a vehicle for exploring the boundaries of human knowledge, imagination, and ingenuity. This article delves into the intricate interplay between science fiction narratives and social awareness, exploring how visionary tales serve as mirrors reflecting contemporary dilemmas, catalysts for critical discourse, and blueprints for societal change.*

**Keyword:** science fiction, social awareness, speculative narrative, visionary tale, fantastical world.

### Introduction

Science fiction is a subgenre of speculative literature that delves into innovative and futuristic concepts like advancements in science and technology. It typically deals with scenarios that are not yet possible in the present time but could potentially be realized through advances in science and technology, or through changes in societal norms and structures. Isaac Asimov, a prolific science fiction writer himself, explained the genre of science fiction as the 'branch of literature which is concerned with the impact of scientific advance upon human beings' (Asimov, 1968, p.2). This definition of science fiction appears in his essay *On Science Fiction*, which was included in his collection of essays titled *Science, Numbers, and I*. The collection was published in 1968. Asimov's definition of science fiction emphasized the role of scientific concepts and their effects on humanity as central to the genre.

Another influential figure in the genre, Robert A Heinlein, described science fiction in the essay titled *On the Writing of Speculative Fiction*. This essay was first appeared in the anthology titled *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science Fiction Writing* (1947), edited by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach. In this essay, Heinlein provides insights into the craft of writing speculative fiction, offering advice to aspiring authors and discussing the principles underlying the genre. He asserts that science fiction is a 'realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method' (Heinlein, 1947, p.29). Heinlein's definition of science fiction emphasizes the importance of scientific accuracy, speculative imagination, and a thorough understanding of the real world in crafting science fiction narratives.

The importance of science fiction lies in its ability to explore possibilities. Science fiction allows writers and readers to investigate a vast array of ideas, possibilities and scenarios, including genetic engineering, time travel, machine learning, space exploration, and parallel realities. It encourages creative thinking and speculation about the future of humanity and the universe. At the same time, science fiction act as a reflection of societal issues and challenges. It often serves as a mirror to society, offering commentary on contemporary issues, ideologies, and social structures. By imagining future worlds or alternate realities, science fiction can provide insight into the human condition, addressing themes such as politics, ethics, identity, and the consequences of scientific and technological progress.

Moreover, science fiction has a long history of influencing scientific advancement and technological innovation in the actual world. Science fiction narratives and its ideas have been credited by several researchers, engineers, and inventors as inspiration for their work. By envisioning new technologies and possibilities, science fiction can stimulate creativity and push the boundaries of what is considered possible. Thereby, it encourages readers, researchers and policy makers to think critically about the implications of scientific and technological advancements, as well as the ethical dilemmas they may present. It raises questions about the potential risks and benefits of certain technologies, prompting discussions about how they should be used and regulated.

There are several writers in the field of literature who considered science fiction as one of the most important genre. One among those writers is Ray Bradbury. He is a notable American writer in the field of science fiction and fantasy. In an interview with Sam Weller for his work *Listen to the Echoes: The Ray Bradbury Interviews* (2010), Bradbury discusses the importance of science fiction, stating that ‘Science fiction is the most important literature in the history of the world, because it’s the history of ideas, the history of our civilization birthing itself’ (Weller, 2010). Bradbury’s remark on science fiction encapsulates his belief in the significance of science fiction as a genre that explores not only technological advancements but also the broader implications of human progress and civilization.

While seriously portraying the elements of reality, Science fiction has a unique ability to provide escapism and entertainment simultaneously. Science fiction often transports readers to imaginative worlds that are vastly different from our own. Whether it's distant planets, future societies, or alternate dimensions, these settings offer an escape from the constraints of everyday life. Individuals can immerse themselves in these fantastical worlds, exploring new landscapes, encountering alien civilizations, and experiencing thrilling adventures that transport them beyond the mundane. The genre is also known for its captivating narratives filled with suspense, action, and intrigue. Whether in novels, films, television shows, or other

media, science fiction stories often feature gripping plots, compelling characters, and unexpected twists that keep audiences engaged and entertained. From epic space battles to mind-bending mysteries, science fiction offers a wide range of thrilling experiences that captivate the imagination and provide hours of entertainment.

Despite its fantastical elements, science fiction frequently incorporates themes and issues that resonate with real-world concerns. By extrapolating current trends into the future or portraying them in alternative contexts, science fiction offers a lens through which to examine contemporary societal, political, and ethical issues. Themes such as climate change, social inequality, technological innovation, and the human condition are often explored in science fiction stories, allowing audiences to engage with these topics in a thought-provoking and meaningful way. It often serves as a vehicle for social commentary and critique, using speculative scenarios to highlight flaws and shortcomings in current systems or ideologies. Through allegory, symbolism, and metaphor, science fiction authors can address sensitive or controversial topics in a manner that is both accessible and impactful. By shining a light on pressing issues and challenging prevailing norms, science fiction encourages readers to critically examine the world around them and consider alternative perspectives.

In the field of literature, science fiction holds a very renowned and esteemed position due to its ability to inspire positive change by offering visions of a better future and exploring possibilities for progress and innovation. By depicting worlds where humanity has overcome its challenges and achieved extraordinary feats, science fiction instills hope and optimism for the future. These visions can serve as inspiration for real-world efforts to address pressing issues and work towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

### **The Mirror Effect: Reflecting Contemporary Dilemmas**

Science fiction functions as a mirror, reflecting back the complexities and contradictions of our own society. Through imaginative settings and allegorical narratives, science fiction authors confront readers with parallel worlds that bear striking resemblance to real world situation, albeit with subtle differences. By extrapolating current social trends to their logical extremes, these narratives offer a sobering reflection of our present realities, often magnifying latent issues that might otherwise go unnoticed.

One example is the dystopian setting described in Margaret Atwood's ground-breaking novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Atwood illustrates the perils of unbridled authoritarianism and the frailty of individual liberties in her novel. It takes place in a near-future world in which women are oppressed and

deprived of their rights. The entire premise of the novel revolves around the oppression of women in the dystopian society of Gilead. It depicts women who are deprived of their rights, forced into specialised tasks (like handmaids for childbearing), and have severe restrictions placed on their behaviour and bodies. The regime's manipulation of religion to justify this oppression highlights the intersection of patriarchal power structures and religious fundamentalism.

The ritualized rape of Handmaids by their Commanders under the guise of religious duty illustrates the normalization of sexual violence and the objectification of women's bodies. The Handmaids' lack of agency over their own bodies and the systematic control exerted over their reproductive capacities demonstrate the extreme lengths to which a society may go to enforce gender roles and maintain power dynamics. The pervasive surveillance in 'Gilead' (Atwood, 1985, p.1), where citizens are constantly monitored and punished for any deviation from the prescribed norms, reflects broader concerns about authoritarianism, government control, and the erosion of individual freedoms. The Eyes, the secret police of Gilead, serve as a constant reminder of the dangers of unchecked state power. Despite the overwhelming oppression they face, characters in the novel demonstrate acts of resistance, both large and small, against the regime. Characters such as Offred, Moira, and Mayday demonstrate the human spirit's persistence in the face of oppression and injustice by their acts of resistance.

At the same time, Atwood depicts environmental degradation and its consequences in Gilead. The toxic environment and declining birth rates serve as a backdrop to the social and political upheaval, suggesting a broader critique of humanity's mistreatment of the planet and its resources. Being a Speculative fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a powerful commentary on a range of societal issues, including gender oppression, authoritarianism, religious extremism, surveillance, environmental degradation, and resistance. Atwood's portrayal of Gilead offers a stark warning about the potential consequences of complacency and the importance of vigilance in defending human rights and dignity. Through the lens of speculative fiction, readers are compelled to confront uncomfortable truths about gender inequality, reproductive rights, and the erosion of civil liberties.

Similarly, Octavia Butler is another notable writer who made significant contribution to the field of science fiction, particularly in challenging traditional narratives and expanding the genre's boundaries. As a well-known science fiction author, Butler was among the first Black American women to be acknowledged. Throughout her career, she championed diversity and representation in the genre, creating complex characters from marginalized backgrounds and exploring themes of race, gender, sexuality, and identity. Through her speculative fiction, she offered incisive critiques of contemporary society and

explored the consequences of systemic injustices. Butler's contributions to science fiction were widely recognized and celebrated during her lifetime. She received numerous awards for her writing, including multiple Hugo and Nebula Awards, two of the most prestigious honours in the genre. She has defined science fiction in many of her works by giving more emphasis on human condition and societal aspects.

Science fiction is not just about technology or far-off worlds; it's about people and society. It allows us to examine issues like race, gender, class, and power in ways that traditional literature may not. Through speculative scenarios, science fiction writers can shine a light on the inequalities and injustices of our world, encouraging readers to question the status quo and envision a more just and equitable future. (Butler, 1995, p.43)

The above passage is taken from one of her notable essay *Positive Obsession* in the book *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995), where she discusses how science fiction is not just about technology or distant worlds but also about people and the social structures they create. She delves into themes of power dynamics, identity, and human relationships, showcasing how science fiction serves as a lens to explore these complex issues within the context of speculative settings.

Her novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is a well-known science fiction that portrays a world ravaged by environmental degradation, social unrest, and economic inequality. The novel is set in a backdrop where droughts, wildfires, and scarcity of resources have devastated communities, forcing people to fend for themselves in a harsh and unforgiving landscape. This portrayal reflects real-world concerns about the consequences of environmental degradation and the urgent need for sustainable practices. Against this backdrop of societal collapse, Butler explores themes of community resilience, empathy, and the human capacity for both destruction and renewal.

The society depicted in the novel *Parable of the Sower* is marked by extreme economic inequality, with the wealthy living in gated communities while the poor struggle to survive in impoverished and dangerous neighbourhoods. The protagonist, Lauren Olamina, comes from a lower-income background and experiences first-hand the struggles of poverty and social marginalization. The novel highlights the systemic injustices that perpetuate economic inequality and the challenges faced by marginalized communities. Race also plays a significant role in the novel as Lauren grapples with her identity as a Black woman in a hostile and racially divided society. The novel explores themes of racism, discrimination, and prejudice, highlighting the enduring legacy of systemic racism and its impact on individuals and communities. Through Lauren's experiences, the novel sheds light on the complexities of race relations and the struggle for racial justice.

In response to the societal chaos and uncertainty, various religious and ideological movements emerge, offering competing visions of salvation and hope. The central character of the novel named Lauren Olamina develops a unique belief system, known as 'Earthseed' (Olamina, 1993, p.1), which centres on change, adaptability, and fortitude in the midst of hardship. The novel explores the dangers of religious extremism and the manipulation of faith for political ends, while also celebrating the power of resilience and spiritual growth. Therefore, the novel *Parable of the Sower* is a thought-provoking work of science fiction that offers a searing critique of contemporary societal issues, including environmental degradation, economic inequality, violence, racism, and religious extremism. Through its vivid portrayal of a dystopian future, the novel highlights its focus on pressing questions about the trajectory of human civilization and the urgent need for social change

### Catalysts for Critical Discourse

Beyond mere reflection, science fiction narratives serve as catalysts for critical discourse, sparking conversations about pressing social issues and prompting audiences to question prevailing norms and assumptions. By presenting readers with thought-provoking scenarios and moral dilemmas, science fiction challenges individuals to re-evaluate their values, beliefs, and ethical frameworks, inviting them to imagine alternative paths forward.

For example, the ethical quandaries are posed by Philip K. Dick's in his science fiction *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). The novel is takes place in a post-apocalyptic world devastated by nuclear global war and environmental collapse, and thereby it explores the themes of environmentalism and ecological stewardship. The scarcity of natural resources, the degradation of the environment, and the commodification of nature reflects on the consequences of human exploitation and neglect of the natural world. This environmental critique stimulates critical discourse about sustainability, consumerism, and the interconnectedness of human and ecological systems.

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* critiques the superficiality and emptiness of consumer culture in a society where material possessions serve as markers of social status and identity. The protagonist of the novel Rick Deckard, grapple with feelings of social alienation and existential angst in a technology centred world where genuine connection and empathy are rare commodities. This critique of consumerism and social alienation prompts critical discourse about the pursuit of meaning, authenticity, and human connection in a technologically driven society.



The novel presents a future where androids are indistinguishable from humans, Dick's novel grapples with questions of identity, empathy, and the nature of personhood. As a bounty hunter tasked with 'retiring rogue androids' (Dick, 1968, p. 42), Rick Deckard is forced to face hard realities regarding ethical and moral consequences of artificial intelligence. This exploration of the ethical implications of creating sentient beings prompts critical discourse about the responsibilities of creators and the treatment of non-human entities. The blurred lines between reality and illusion, human and artificial, prompt individuals to question the reliability of their own perceptions and the nature of objective truth. This interrogation of reality and perception stimulates critical discourse about the nature of reality, subjective experience, and the limits of human understanding.

*Neuromancer* (1968) by William Gibson is another science fiction that serves as a catalyst for critical discourse on various themes and issues, prompting individuals to engage with complex questions about technology, identity, society, and the future. *Neuromancer* is often credited with popularizing the concept of cyberspace and virtual reality. The novel imagines a future in which technology and mankind are inextricably linked, making it difficult to distinguish between the real world and the virtual one. Gibson's vision of a global network of information and communication systems anticipates many aspects of the internet and digital culture that have since become reality. This exploration of cybernetics and technological innovation prompts critical discourse about the impact of technology on human society, ethics, and identity.

The novel depicts a dystopian future where multinational corporations wield immense power and influence, shaping the course of society and politics. *Neuromancer* critiques the consolidation of corporate power and the erosion of individual freedoms in a world dominated by corporate interests. This exploration of corporate power and globalization brings out critical discourse about the consequences of unchecked capitalism, economic inequality, and the commodification of information. At the same time, it explores themes of post-humanism and trans-humanism, envisioning a future where humanity merges with technology to transcend its biological limitations. The protagonist of the novel is a trained hacker named Henry Case. It also includes several cyborg characters, such as Molly Millions and Wintermute, which blur the boundaries between human and machine, encouraging critical thought about the implications of artificial intelligence, human development, and the ethics of human enhancement.

Ursula K. Le Guin is another well-known writer in the genre of science fiction. Her writings was characterized by its lyrical prose, rich imagery, and philosophical depth. She was a masterful storyteller who seamlessly blended literary craftsmanship with speculative imagination. Her works were celebrated not only for their imaginative worlds and thought-provoking themes but also for their literary merit, earning

her numerous prestigious awards and accolades, including multiple Hugo and Nebula Awards. Le Guin's exploration of gender and feminism was ground-breaking within the genre of science fiction. She wrote the science fiction *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), where she introduced the readers to the concept of a genderless society, challenging traditional binary notions of gender and sexuality. Through her portrayal of diverse and complex characters, Le Guin pushed the boundaries of representation and highlighted the fluidity of identity and relationships.

She also wrote the novel *The Dispossessed* (1974), which offers a poignant meditation on the complexities of social organization, power dynamics, and the pursuit of utopia. The novel takes place in the backdrop of a binary star system where two contrasting societies coexist – one capitalist and the other anarchist. It explores the principles of anarchism through its portrayal of the society of 'Anarres' (Le Guin, 1974, p.2), a moon colony founded on anarchist principles of communal ownership, voluntary cooperation, and decentralized governance. The novel prompts critical discourse about the feasibility and implications of anarchism as a political philosophy, raising questions about power dynamics, individual freedom, and the potential for creating alternative social structures. Through its depiction of the contrasting societies of Anarres and its neighboring capitalist world, 'Urras' (Le Guin, 1974, p.2), the novel highlights the merits and drawbacks of capitalism and socialism. Le Guin's exploration of these economic systems draw special attention to wealth distribution, social inequality, labour exploitation, and the relationship between economic structures and individual freedom

Le Guin's novel explores the tensions between individual freedom and collective responsibility, hierarchy and egalitarianism, innovation and tradition. Through the experiences of protagonist Shevek, a physicist from the anarchist world of Anarres, who seeks to transcend social and political boundaries, the novel explores themes of freedom, individualism, and the pursuit of truth. By presenting two divergent visions of society, Le Guin challenges us to imagine alternatives to the status quo and to consider the potential consequences of our choices.

### **Blueprints for Societal Change**

In addition to fostering critical discourse, science fiction narratives often serve as blueprints for societal change, inspiring readers to envision and enact a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. By presenting us with visions of possibility and hope, science fiction empowers us to imagine alternative realities and to strive toward a more inclusive and compassionate world.

Consider, for instance, the transformative impact of *Star Trek*, Gene Roddenberry's visionary science fiction franchise. From its inception in the 1960s to its latest iterations in the 21st century, *Star Trek* has captivated audiences with its optimistic vision of the future – a future where humanity has transcended war, poverty, and prejudice to explore the cosmos as members of a united interstellar federation. Through its diverse cast of characters, its emphasis on diplomacy and cooperation, and its exploration of complex social issues, *Star Trek* has inspired generations of fans to embrace values of tolerance, diversity, and exploration. Indeed, the franchise's iconic motto, 'to boldly go where no one has gone before,' serves as a rallying cry for those who dare to imagine a better world and to work toward its realization.

The original *Star Trek* television series debuted in 1966 and ran for three seasons. The show, which took place in the twenty-third century, chronicled the crew of the USS Enterprise as they travelled space, interacted with other species, and struggled with issues of ethics and morality. The series broke new ground with its diverse cast and progressive themes, addressing issues such as racism, sexism, and Cold War tensions. It is also known for its exploration of philosophical and ethical themes, including the value of diversity, the pursuit of knowledge, and the quest for peace and cooperation among different cultures. The franchise's vision of a future where humanity has overcome its differences and united in a quest for exploration and discovery has inspired generations of fans and influenced public discourse on issues such as social justice, diplomacy, and environmentalism.

*Star Trek* has had a profound cultural impact, influencing popular culture, literature, and academia. It is credited with inspiring real-world technological innovations, such as the development of cell phones, tablet computers, and medical devices. The show's futuristic technology, including the iconic communicator and tricorder devices, has served as inspiration for scientists, engineers, and inventors, demonstrating the power of science fiction to influence real-world innovation.

Similarly, the Afrofuturist movement presents a potent vision of emancipation, empowerment, and self-determination. It is a cultural and artistic movement that blends aspects of modern science fiction, fantasies, and the elements of African diasporic culture. Emerging in the late 20th century as a response to the marginalization of Black voices in mainstream science fiction, Afrofuturism seeks to reimagine the past, present, and future through a lens of Afrocentricity and futurism. Through literature, music, film, and visual art, Afrofuturist creators explore themes of identity, agency, and resistance, envisioning worlds where Black people occupy positions of power, creativity, and influence. From the visionary fiction of Octavia Butler to the Afrocentric aesthetics of Sun Ra, Afrofuturism offers a rich tapestry of narratives that

challenge, inspire, and empower audiences to envision alternative futures grounded in the principles of justice, equality, and cultural pride.

Overall, science fiction acts as a blueprint for societal change by envisioning alternative futures, exploring social issues, inspiring innovation, and catalysing social movements. In the current era, as society grapples with complex challenges and uncertainties, science fiction continues to serve as a powerful tool for imagining and shaping a better world. By presenting various future scenarios, science fiction continues to encourage individuals to consider the consequences of present-day decisions and to envision alternative paths forward.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, science fiction narratives play a vital role in illuminating social issues, serving as mirrors, catalysts, and blueprints for societal change. Through imaginative storytelling, speculative world-building, and provocative themes, science fiction challenges us to confront the complexities of our own society, to engage in critical discourse, and to imagine alternative futures shaped by justice, equality, and compassion. As we confront the problems of the twenty-first century, from social injustice and technological disruption to climate change and technological disruption and political polarisation—science fiction offers us a guiding light, inspiring us to envision new possibilities, to challenge the existing social affairs, and to strive toward a better tomorrow.

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## Cultural Imperialism and the Political Economy of the OTT Platforms in India

Shashwati Goswami

### Abstract:

*Indian audience warmed up to the OTT content during the Covid-19 lockdown imposed in the early part of 2020. Since then, India has witnessed massive growth of the OTT platforms, both international and home-grown. The international platforms started pumping money into the production of Indian content in a few major languages of India, led by Hindi. The consumption of OTT content also received a boost due to the cheap data packages available in India. The OTT platforms started vying for the consumer space, offering affordable packages and indulging in other gimmicks. There have been efforts of acquisitions and offers of freebies by the big platforms to attract and retain their audience. As a result of the exposure to various contents, the consumption habits of the audience have undergone impressive changes which have also impacted the Indian Film industry. The geographical divide that existed in the industry is falling apart and, the face of the film industry is undergoing massive change.*

*This paper analyses the political economy of the OTT platforms and its impact on the Indian audiences. Is it a classic case of cultural imperialism or it is challenging the debate altogether? Is there a challenge of 'too much content' being faced by the OTT platforms?*

### Introduction

India is the home to the most prolific film industry in the world with multiple language production facilities. The advent of internet-distributed video, which is popularly known as over-the-top (OTT) video services, marked a significant disruptive interpolation in the Indian market of audio-visual content. OTT platforms in India thrived post Covid-19 pandemic when people were forced to remain indoors. As per the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting data India has a total of 57 OTT platforms<sup>1</sup> as of March 2023, which is not a comprehensive list.

### The great Indian internet story:

According to Statista report<sup>2</sup> of February 2024, OTT market in India is projected to reach \$4.06 billion in 2024 with a combined annual growth of 7.43 per cent in 2024-29. The number of viewers is also expected

to increase from 45.8 per cent in 2024 to 54.4 per cent in 2029. Another report<sup>3</sup> by PwC states that India will see around 60 per cent growth in the OTT revenue from 2023 to 2027. The driving forces behind this growth story are the increase in the number of smart phones as well as the availability of cheap data packages. Statista, reports that the number of smart phone users in India will be over one billion in 2023 and it has been projected to increase to 1.55 billion by 2040<sup>4</sup>. The same website shows that in the year 2022, the revenue from subscription for OTT video platforms across India amounted to approximately 68 billion Indian rupees. This was expected to shoot up to 91 billion rupees by 2025. Overall, the digital market in the media and entertainment sector across India is set to become the second largest<sup>5</sup> in the world. India created almost 200,000 hours of content of which 3888 hours was of film and 2986 hours was of OTT, which was lesser in 2023 in comparison to earlier years and there is an indication of further decrease in 2024<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, other Indian regional languages OTT content volume exceeded Hindi language content in 2023 for the first time<sup>7</sup>.

Statista<sup>8</sup> also states that India has over 1.2 billion internet users as of July 2023. This figure has been projected to grow to over 1.6 billion users by 2050. In fact, India was ranked second largest online market worldwide in 2022, behind China. In 2022, there were 399 million internet users in rural India compared to 360 million urban internet users. This jump in rural internet penetration was largely owing to the combined effect of increased availability of bandwidth, cheap data plans and various government initiatives under the Digital India campaign launched in 2015<sup>9</sup>. From just 27 percent internet penetration rate in 2015, India reached almost 49 percent in 2022.

India has the second cheapest mobile data package behind Israel. Cost of 1GB of data in Israel is \$0.02 and in India \$0.20 as of 2023<sup>10</sup>. However, the demand for smart phones is reportedly decreasing. The data released by the International Data Corporation in its report on the Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker, Indian smart phone market has seen a 10 per cent decline with only 64 million units being shipped in the first quarter of 2023. However, this market is showing a 'premiumisation' trend due to the increase in the high-end smart phone market<sup>11</sup>. In fact, handsets costing more than Rs 30,000 have been reported to be now 20 per cent of the total number, in the Q1 of 2024, the highest till date<sup>12</sup>. And that will definitely have an impact on the OTT consumer numbers too.

### **OTT in India:**

In India, BigFlix, launched by Reliance Entertainment in 2008 was the first OTT platform. However, the OTT phenomenon in India started picking up with the international platforms like Netflix (January 2016) and Amazon Prime (July 2016), Disney+Hotstar (as Hotstar in February 2015 and eventually in 2020 as Disney+Hotstar) etc. foraying into the market. All these international platforms produce and host content in English and a few major Indian languages. However, in the recent years, there has been a growth of single Indian language platforms too. For example, Hoichoi, Klikk and Addatimes exclusively in Bengali; Reeldrama and CND Play in Assamese; Kanccha Lanka, Olly Plus and Tarang Plus in Odia, OHO and City Shor in Gujarati, AHA in Telugu (recently added Tamil content too), Koodé and Manorama Max in Malayalam, Stage in Haryanvi, Planet Marathi in Marathi etc. Interestingly the numbers are quite dynamic. There are a number of platforms which are playing safe by offering a bouquet of regional language content except Hindi. Out of all the regional languages, the four South India languages, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada content are available on all the major international platforms too. This has led to the consumers being exposed to content in other Indian languages dubbed in Hindi and English. As a result, India is witnessing the production of even big budget Hindi films in multiple South Indian languages. The big budget, big director, big producer backed films like PS-I, PS-II, RRR, *Gangubai Kathiawadi* etc., were released in multiple languages. *Jawan*, the 2023 blockbuster featuring Shahrukh Khan, was a collaborative product of South and North India, directed by a Tamil director Atlee and has actors from different regions of India. It was dubbed in Tamil and Telugu and was released in all the languages simultaneously. Similarly, another big grosser, *Animal*, directed by a Telugu director, featured big names from the Hindi film industry, and was released in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. This can be termed as a visible side effect of OTT platforms. People are wanting and accepting content of various languages. The Indian audience is not only consuming other Indian language content, there has been a huge demand for Western content dubbed not only in Hindi but also in other Indian languages. Many blockbuster Western films are being released in the theatres as well as on OTT in dubbed version.

Big film stars are landing on the OTT platforms too. Recently, Shahrukh Khan's daughter, Sridevi's daughter and Amitabh Bachchan's grandson debuted in their acting career through a film exclusively produced for Netflix. However, the charismatic star power-pull is not yet visible on the OTT platforms. The hits of OTT are said to be more because of the content it has been churning out. Though with the



successful runs of films like *Oppenheimer*, *Pathan*, *Rocky aur Rani ki Prem Kahani*, *Gadar 2*, *Dreamgirl 2*, *OMG 2*, *Jawan*, *Animal* etc., people are returning to the movie theatres, yet the way all these films have streaming partners already collaborating at the production phase, OTT has been definitely recognized by the producers as here to stay. In fact, many people wait to watch a film on OTT rather than go to the theatre.

All the above is direct fallout of the interesting arithmetic of pricing of OTT subscription plans. A cable or DTH subscription cost minimum Rs 300 a month. A bouquet of OTT will definitely cost more, i.e., Rs 1000-1500 a month. However, the option of being able to share and the availability of cheaper OTT Apps makes it somewhat pocket friendly. Let us do the calculation based on the plans available on a selected few popular platforms.

### **Pricing war:**

The pricing patterns of the OTT platforms reflect the class structure of the country. Netflix's premium subscription is for Rs 649 per month and five customers can stream the content parallelly with one of those being for kids. This costs roughly about Rs 124 per person. But password sharing enables it to be availed by more than five customers. Netflix has been realizing the loss of customers due to this sharing possibility and has recently decided to plug that in India.<sup>13</sup> In fact it has been reported that after Netflix implemented this restriction in other countries and has gained more than six million subscribers globally. The India number is yet to come. The mobile version of Netflix is priced at Rs 149, the basic plan at Rs 199 and standard plan at Rs 499<sup>14</sup>. The difference between the plans is in terms of number of accessible parallel screens as well as that of the streaming quality. Ad-supported content has not been introduced in India yet, though they are planning to introduce it in the near future<sup>15</sup>.

Prime Video on the other hand is linked to the Amazon shopping App. Prime Video has the option of monthly (Rs 299), quarterly (Rs 599), annual Prime (Rs 1499) and annual Prime Lite (Rs 999)<sup>16</sup> subscription plans. Prime Video comes with a bouquet of facilities including many on the shopping App. This can be used on six devices and has a 4K resolution. Lite has ads and can be streamed only on two devices. Amazon also has a youth offer for young adults in the age band of 18-24 years, which costs Rs 179 for one month and Rs 1499 for a year with 50 per cent cash back facility. It is mandatory to submit age verification documents to avail the offer. Prime video also offers bundled services of 21 other OTT platforms including Mubi, Hoichoi, Lionsgate Play and BBC Player at subsidized rate. Amazon Shopping

App also has an in-built Mini TV for their subscribers, which is free of cost for even non-subscribers. It has registered an increase in its viewership in the last year<sup>17</sup>.

Disney+ Hotstar offers three plans. The mobile ad-supported plan costs Rs 149 for three months and Rs 499 for a year, with HD quality and is usable only on one device. Super plan, also an ad-supported one costs Rs 899 for a year usable on two devices at a time with HD quality. The premium plan is mostly ad-free (except in the case of live shows), 4K quality, usable on four devices, costing Rs 1499 annually<sup>18</sup>. With merger with Jio, these plans will soon be redundant.

Voot Select, launched in 2016, owned by Viacom18, has been recently acquired by Jio Cinema<sup>19</sup>. Viacom18 was a joint venture between Network18---a subsidiary of Reliance Industries and Paramount Global and Jio Cinema, owned by Reliance Projects and Property Management Services Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd. Therefore, the merger was actually targeted at scaling up Jio Cinema. Before the merger, Voot Select was much affordable with young, lower middle-class people using it. After the merger in July 2023, the existing customers of Voot Select automatically got access to Jio Cinema without any extra payment. However, they will have to pay Rs 999 annually for renewal of subscription. That will give access to four screens in full video and audio quality.

Annual subscription rate of Zee5's mobile only plan is for Rs 499, Premium HD usable on two devices parallelly is for Rs 699 and Premium 4K is for Rs 1499. The difference is only of the streaming quality<sup>20</sup>. Sony Liv mobile only plan is for Rs 599 per annum, usable only on one device. The premium plan has three slabs i.e., Rs 999 (365 days), Rs 699 (180 days) and Rs 299 (30 days). While the customers of the first two slabs can stream on two devices parallelly, the 30 days subscription allows access on only one device<sup>21</sup>.

Sun NXT, an OTT platform which offers content in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi and Bengali has two variations, basic and premium. The basic is Rs 480 per annum and has ads and is available on one device. Whereas, premium is ad-free and costs Rs 490 (four screens) for 365 days, Rs 130 (one screen) for a quarterly subscription and Rs 50 (one screen) for one month<sup>22</sup>. There was no clear information available on the Sun NXT website. Out of all OTT platforms, only a few were selected for this short analysis. It is mentionable here that the above prices are subject to changes anytime and reflect the pricing pattern existent when this article is being written.

Hoichoi, an OTT platform offering content in Bengali language has two plans. Rs 999 (price slashed from 1499 according to the website) annual plan, which can be simul-streamed on two devices but can be connected on five devices. The quarterly plan is for Rs 499, can be streamed only on one device but can be accessed through three devices<sup>23</sup>.

Out of all OTT platforms, only a few were selected for this short analysis. It is mentionable here that the above prices are subject to changes anytime and reflect the pricing pattern existent when this article is being written. An analysis of the price slabs of the OTT platforms makes two things clear. Firstly, the platforms are trying their level best to lure viewers from all classes of the society by offering competitive slabs. Secondly, they are resorting to dynamic slabs to brace the challenges at them thrown by their competitors.

### **Jio Cinema: The Big Next**

Jio Cinema is turning out to be the next big thing on OTT in India. Jio Cinema acquired the rights to the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Cricket tournament in 2022 for five years, i.e., till 2027, for \$3 billion. The platform allowed free streaming of the tournament and on the day of the final match 32 million simultaneous views were reported, making it the most watched digital event globally. The live streaming of the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of IPL garnered 17 billion video views and 120 million unique views where 26 brands partnered with Jio Cinema<sup>24</sup>. On the day of writing this line, the 2024 edition of the ongoing IPL 2024 has registered a record-breaking viewership of over 590 million on Jio Cinema<sup>25</sup> in a total of 18 matches.

In addition to absorbing the Voot Select content into its platform, Jio Cinema has also signed a deal with Warner Brothers and NBC Universal, which have given access to excellent international content to the subscribers. Jio Cinema has also acquired rights to more than 1000 episodes and around 20 movies of Japanese anime series Pokémon<sup>26</sup>.

The great merger story of India is that of Jio Cinema and Disney+ Hotstar<sup>27</sup>. As per the reports in the media, the stock merger will see 51-49 split in favour of Reliance. According to the newspaper The Economic Times<sup>28</sup>, Reliance Industries and Walt Disney Co. have signed a non-binding term sheet in London in the third week of December 2023 to move ahead with the plans to create India's largest media and entertainment business. This has now become a reality resulting in the emergence of the largest media giant in the Indian media and entertainment industry. It will be an \$8.5-billion gargantuan media house<sup>29</sup>. In

2021, Zee Entertainment Enterprises and Sony Group Corporations local unit also declared a \$10 billion merger, which has been reported to be in troubled water with Zee approaching National Company Law Tribunal to direct Sony to implement it at the earliest<sup>30</sup>. As of September 30, 2023, Jio Cinema was the top broadcaster-OTT App in the country with an average of 210 million monthly active users as per the data from Data.ai. Sensor Tower, which has acquired Data.ai recently reports that Jio Cinema has monthly active user (MAU) of 95 million and Disney+ Hotstar has 333 million in the December quarter of 2023. In the March 2024 quarter, Jio Cinema is estimated to have crossed 110-120 million MAUs even as Hotstar's numbers have fallen to below 200 million<sup>31</sup>. This merger needs further analysis in the future keeping in view the larger ecosystem of Reliance the parent company of Jio Cinema.

### **The Future:**

Ormax Media's recent report shows a slump in the growth of the OTT market from 20 per cent in 2022 to 13.5 per cent in 2023 with no prediction of change in 2024<sup>32</sup>. The Ormax report also points out that the growth in OTT category in 2023 was more visible in the tier-two cities and the rural areas, with 23 per cent penetration as opposed to 81 per cent in the metros. This will definitely create a pricing game. And also, there is all possibility of the regional language OTT platforms becoming the focus of investment by the big players.

The OTT domain is also seeing a cross platform ownership to lure more customers. Netflix has recently partnered with Jio to offer prepaid tariff plans bundled with a subscription. Jio has launched two prepaid plans priced at Rs 1099 (2GB/day) and Rs 1,499 (3GB/day) with a validity of 84 days. The former comes embedded with the Netflix mobile plan which costs Rs 149 per month, while the later includes the basic plan which is of Rs 199 per month. Earlier Netflix tied up with Airtel but that was only for the post-paid customers, who account for only 6 per cent of the total number of subscribers<sup>33</sup>. The partnership with Jio has been forged with the belief that Netflix will become accessible to a large base of prepaid wireless subscribers of Jio, which has market share of 38.17 per cent subscribers<sup>34</sup> as in May 2023. In fact, ALT Balaji and Eros Now debuted their OTT platforms free on Jio Cinema and Jio TV. Jio Cinema is also offering Sun NXT in the South Indian languages<sup>35</sup>. As mentioned above, in 2021, Prime Video reinvented itself as the Super App providing content of 21 other OTT platforms for a nominal charge.<sup>36</sup> In fact, rising subscription fatigue to multiple platforms has created a space for the OTT aggregators. As the FICCI 2024

report<sup>37</sup> suggests, the share of Indian language content will increase to 55 per cent of the total content generated on OTT. This might lead to flow of capital towards the production of regional content.

Media Partners Asia report states that, Indians spent 6.1 trillion minutes watching online content but 88 per cent of the time they are consuming free content and only 12 per cent are paying for the content<sup>38</sup>. Though the actual number might look impressive, but we need to remember that India is a highly populous country and such numbers are not so impressive if we keep that in mind. The heat is being felt by the platforms too. They are now increasingly indulging in gimmicks. For example, the reportedly highly viewed *The Night Manager* released on Disney+ Hotstar resorted to two-part release with a gap of four months, shows like *Akhri Sach* went the TV soap style, dropping one episode per week, *Jubilee* had a gap of one week between the episodes. A study by Ormax Media showed that these gimmicks had no effect on the viewership<sup>39</sup>. The free to view content released by Jio Cinema also is doing no wonders. The Shahid Kapoor starrer *Bloody Daddy* which was free to watch on the platform had only around 6 million views on the opening weekend. Neither stars nor free content is attracting consumers to the OTT. This might lead to the acquiring of smaller platforms by the bigger ones like the Jio acquisitions.

Another interesting story is unfolding not only in India, but also in the US. The big players are increasingly foraying into the production of films, documentaries and other shows etc. Apple Inc's video division started investing in production and distribution of video content in 2018 with an initial budget of \$1 billion, which has tripled since<sup>40</sup>. The content produced by Apple has been hot favourite in the award functions with *Killer of the Flower Moon* raking up many in the Golden Globe, 2023. Amazon bought Metro Goldwyn Meyer in 2021. Jio Studio declared in 2023 that they were investing big in producing films and shows with a budget of 2000 crore<sup>41</sup>. Hesmondhalgh<sup>42</sup> called this foray of big tech corporation into content creation as "wholesale power grab by the tech sector".

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

Many media critics termed the phenomenal growth of the Western media content across the globe as the new-age media imperialism (Fitzgerald 2019 pp. 89-115, Jin 2017 pp. 3880-98, 2015 p. 49 and 2016 pp. 322-49). This has been possible due to the extraordinary investment that the world has seen post World War II in communication technology. 'Information' became the primary ontological principle across

sciences as Gleick (2011) discusses extensively in his book. Even Economists like Mirowski and Nik-Khah (2017) studied how information flow drove the market. The economic historian Joel Mokyr (2002) elaborates on how investment in science and technology fuelled the growth and legitimisation of capitalism across the globe. Castells in his various writings (1996, 1997 and 1998) discussed the symbiotic relationship between liberalisation and computer technologies and how it has led to the phenomenon called the ‘information age’.

Explaining the importance of a world economy for the proliferation of capitalism, Marx noted (1973, p. 408), “the tendency to create the world market is directly given in the concept of capital itself. Every limit appears as a barrier to be overcome”. Thus, capital strives “to tear down every spatial barrier” to exchange and to “conquer the whole earth for its market.” Therefore, critics argue that cultural imperialism and cultural dependency should not be regarded as a conspiracy or manipulation rather should be regarded as a structural fact of capitalism, at the core of which lies the unequal information and communication exchange in the world. Schröter (2016, pp. 133-150) states that the internet facilitates the creation of the concept of “Frictionless Capitalism” and therefore the cultural imperialism of this time is fuelled by the internationalization of capital and the rise of ‘informational’ economic as well as political processes. Which according to Castells has enabled “information itself to become the product of the production process”, leading to the emergence of “A networked, deeply interdependent economy” (1996, p. 67). Castells also says that this has been made possible by a “historical convergence” of three processes: information technology revolution, evolution of capitalism/statism and cultural social movements (1997b, p.139). This historical convergence has led to the emergence of Digital Capitalism, where the geographical boundaries are obliterated and the capital has free flow with the help of technology.

Analysing the growth of the OTT platforms in India, it can be safely said that this has led to a new form of imperialism which the critical political economists of communication terms as “imperialism with a vengeance” (Schiller and Yeo 2019, pp 70-82). The home-grown platforms like Jio and other Indian language OTT platforms, is posing a serious challenge to the US based OTT platforms in their attempt to stay in the race. The way Disney succumbed in front of Jio, it will be interesting to watch the future trajectory of this growth story. Content wise, many US origin formats, like Bigg Boss or *Kaun Banega*

*Crorepati* are lapped up by the audience but that is not a new development. When Miguel Sabido of Mexico trained the production staff of Doordarshan to produce the first television soap of India, *Hum Log*, the tone was set (Goswami 2023, pp. 146-48). In spite of a spate in the number of OTT platforms, there have been reports of stagnation in the consumer base of OTT too. Meanwhile, the novelty of OTT content which people were hooting for needs to be back. But, knowing the intricate relationship that exists between the market and technology, the content will definitely evolve accordingly. In the meantime, the Government of India has announced the launch of its own OTT platform, showcasing Indian culture and values<sup>43</sup>. This reiterates the relevance of OTT in the media and entertainment industry in the time to come.

#### Notes and References:

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<sup>1</sup>[https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/List%20of%20OTT%20Platforms\\_0.pdf](https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/List%20of%20OTT%20Platforms_0.pdf) accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024

<sup>2</sup><https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/media/tv-video/ott-video/india> accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024

<sup>3</sup><https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/industries/entertainment-and-media/global-entertainment-and-media-outlook-2023-2027-india-perspective-v1.pdf> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<sup>4</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/467163/forecast-of-smartphone-users-in-india/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20smartphone%20users,India%20will%20reach%201.55%20billion.&text=The%20number%20of%20smartphone%20users%20worldwide%20is%20projected%20to,nearly%207.7%20billion%20by%202027> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> FICCI-EY Report 2024. *#Reinvent: India's Media and Entertainment Sector is Innovating for the Future*. FICCI downloaded from [https://www.ey.com/en\\_in/media-entertainment/reinvent-india-s-m-e-sector-is-innovating-for-the-future#:~:text=70%25%20of%20the%20M%26E%20sector's,2019%20to%2038%25%20in%202023](https://www.ey.com/en_in/media-entertainment/reinvent-india-s-m-e-sector-is-innovating-for-the-future#:~:text=70%25%20of%20the%20M%26E%20sector's,2019%20to%2038%25%20in%202023) on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/255146/number-of-internet-users-in-india/> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<sup>9</sup><https://csc.gov.in/digitalIndia> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cable.co.uk/mobiles/worldwide-data-pricing/> accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2024

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## Empowering Rural Women of Kashmir: Do Self-Help Groups make a Difference

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to explore the role of self-help groups in empowering rural women and promoting gender equality in Kashmir. It argues that the socio-cultural context of Kashmir society presents unique challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment and how the development of self-help groups plays a significant role in overcoming these challenges and enhancing the agency of rural women. In India, empowerment of women has gained substantial momentum over the past few decades, with both national and international stakeholders recognizing the importance of promoting gender equality for sustainable development. As a result, self-help groups have emerged as significant initiatives in the direction of empowerment of women in India in general and Kashmiri society in particular. This is a qualitative study based on 20 respondents who were selected on the basis of purposive random sampling. The data was collected by using interview schedule, group discussion and observation method. The findings of the study revealed that after joining the self-help groups substantial structural changes has occurred in the overall life course of the respondents as well as their socio-economic conditions has improved significantly.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Self-Help Groups, Rural Women, NABARD, Micro-finance.

### Introduction

The concept of empowerment was first introduced in third international women conference held at Nairobi, in 1985 (Chandra, 2015, p, 66). Women empowerment is a multidimensional concept that aims to give people the ability to assert control over their daily routines and decisions." (Mukhai, R, 2016:2). One of the effective ways to empower woman is join SHGs, as an effective instruments and strategies for poverty reduction, women's development and empowerment. SHGs are also regarded as a movement in recent years to meet the needs of poor rural women and to determine their destinies through the principles of the women, for the women and of the women. A self-help group is a small volunteer group comprising of 10 to 20

local rural women who get together to establish a group for reduction of poverty and development of women (Wani & Taranum, 2020:1941). It is a small, volunteer organization made up primarily of impoverished people from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. They make these informal groups for solving their common problems through SHGs. They are economically homogenous affinity groups of the poor rural women voluntarily ready to contribute according to their group decision which works for group solidarity, self-group awareness, and social and economic empowerment through democratic functioning (Pandey, 2014:92). These groups are expected to be homogenous in which all the members actively participate without fear in the decision-making process. SHGs have significantly contributed to the training of self-employment skills, infrastructure development, marketing strategies, technology assistance, communication enhancement among members, boosting self-confidence, reducing family violence, increasing interaction with outsiders, altering saving habits, fostering social cohesion, ensuring sustainability, and enhancing financial worth (Selvi & Shanmughun, 2016).

The origin of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) traces back to the visionary concept of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, established by economist Professor Mohammad Yunus of Chittagong University in 1975. In the 1980's, The Indian government made a sincere effort to encourage top banks to serve the financial needs of the underprivileged, the unorganized sector, and rural areas. During that time, the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development, or NABARD, took action and started looking for alternate ways to meet the needs of the impoverished in rural areas. Although NABARD was founded in 1986–1987, the major work was done in 1991–1992, when SHGs and banks were linked. Moreover, The establishment of NABARD and SHGs bank linkage by NABARD played an important role in the development of SHGs by overlooking the performance of such groups and permitted RBI, commercial banks and NGO's to provide credit to Self Help Groups (Devadasan, et.al 2019:256).

Moreover, in 1999, the government launched the 'Swarnajyanti Gram Sawarozgar Yojana' to encompass various aspects of self-employment initiatives, aimed at empowering rural areas. Subsequently, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, revamped the program, replacing SGSY with the NRLM scheme in 2011. This initiative aimed to organize those in need into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), facilitating their access to microfinance, sustainable livelihood opportunities, and financial inclusion.

### Self-Help Groups in Jammu and Kashmir

2011 census, noted that the total population of J & K is 1.25 crore. Among them 6,640,662 males and 5,900,640 females. The state has a sex ratio of 889, which is comparatively very low to the national average of 940. The fact is known that the economy of Jammu and Kashmir has been affected due to conflict for the last 30 years. Disturbances in J and K have deeply affected people's livelihood, employment, education, attitudes, health, habits, and overall development (*Qadir et al., 2013:22*). In order to improve the conditions of women, government has launched several scheme and programmes for upliftment of poor rural women in India. The main scheme is SGSY which was introduced in 1999 with the main objective of developing micro-enterprises belonging to poor sections of society. This scheme was restructured in February 2013 into NRLM (national rural livelihood mission) and implemented in all 22 districts of JK locally known as UMEED (Hope) by JK rural livelihood mission which aims a heavy emphasis on the formation of SHGs. The main objective of NRLM is to form SHGs, especially for women and help them to start some entrepreneurial activities to improve their socio-economic status (*Khurshid, N, 2015:30-31*). The JKSRML has also linked these SHGs to bank linkage programs for enabling them to access easy credit and enhanced livelihoods.

### Literature Review

The review of the studies about the role of self-help groups in providing micro-finance and poverty alleviation states that SHGs had played a key role in poverty reduction, improvement, empowerment and gender equality with the inclusion of micro-finance institutions. Micro-finance is an important tool in the new economy with the main aim to financially help and improve the socio-economic status through promoting small-scale business enterprises among poor rural women in India. (*Bonia, B 2019, Bag, A. & Vendanthadesikan, 2021*).

The review of studies on the socio-economic empowerment of rural women through SHGs revealed that the life patterns and styles of impoverished women have been greatly impacted by women's participation in SHGs. They united under the umbrella of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to address shared challenges, thereby empowering themselves on multiple fronts—as individuals, as integral family members, and as members of society at large. SHGs offer opportunities not only access to financial resources. But also gaining control over means of living, gaining self-confidence, economic independence and capacity building. By becoming a

member of SHGs, women become socially and economically empowered (*Suvakkin & Maheshwari 2014, Amutha 2011, Nithya & Sahad, 2019*).

It was also observed in some other studies that the SHGs had proven to be one of the best in the micro-financial sector in India. The SHGs have not only improved the financial status of women but also their social status. Right from developing the habit of savings, understanding various environmental and social problems, developing communication skills, the prompt repayment of debts, the tendency to help others, confidence level, decision-making power and the like had brought about vast changes among self-help group participants (*Shakti (2018), Vinodhini & Vaijayanthi (2017)*).

### **Objectives of Study**

- To study the socio-economic profile of SHG members in district Kupwara, Kashmir
- To analyze the working pattern of members of SHGs after joining the SHGs.
- To analyze the role of SHGs in the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Kupwara district of Kashmir.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study was conducted in the Kupwara district of the Kashmir region of India. A total of 20 respondents were selected as samples based on purposive random sampling. The data was collected by using primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected by using an interview schedule, group discussion, observation methods and the secondary data were collected from papers, articles, books, and block rural development agencies as well.

### **Result and Discussions**

#### **Basic Education and Personality Development**

Education is the main pillar of personality development and women empowerment through which a person came to know our strength & weakness, self-confidence and positivity and Comprehension of oneself and of society. Thus, acknowledging the significance of education and its favourable effects on women is essential for the progress of both the individual and

society. Presently in rural areas, SHGs emerged as an instrument through which women were given training from time to time in order to develop their skills and basic knowledge.

The educational background of the respondents illustrates that the majority of the respondents are illiterate as a result they are dependent on others. Before joining the SHGs, they faced various problems both within and outside of the family and sometimes they have to face domestic violence because of unawareness about rights.

While doing the survey, when the researcher was trying to understand their educational background one woman namely *Naseema begum* narrates; *before joining the SHGs, I faced different problems as I was not able to write my name and instead of signing the important documents, I usually did thumb impression as I am not literate enough to sign the document. But after I joined joining the SHGs, I received basic educational training on how to sign, how to write my name, and how to introduce myself in group meetings or in front of the officials.*

The majority of the respondents expressed that after joining the self-help group they got an opportunity to learn basic education as a result of this, they are feeling somehow educationally improved and empowered as compared to their earlier situation. Now they are able to sign, write their names, easily fill their forms, use their mobile phone, introduce themselves etc. without the help of others. They also realized that basic education for women is significant in all spheres of life and this basic education that is needed to understand the complexities of the family is now bestowed on women by the self-help groups.

### **Training and Skill Development**

Capacity development is the cornerstone of the NRLM. The main purpose of NRLM is to organize various workshops and review meetings to brainstorm and develop skills among poor rural women. SHGs provide developmental support to unemployed and illiterate SHGs members with a view to increasing entrepreneurship, livelihood potential and wage employment opportunities.

The respondents expressed that before joining the SHGs they were busy with household activities which were neither recognized nor satisfied by the members of the family. They were regarded as unskilled labourers instead of doing each and every work at home because that work was not counted in terms of monetary value. As a result, they faced various problems.



*Against this backdrop Shafiqah begum narrates; that before joining the SHGs she was economically dependent on male members of the family as a result, she sometimes has faced domestic violence because of illiteracy, unemployed and no earning wages. But after joining the SHGs I got an opportunity to get training in cutting and tailoring through this scheme. Now I have started a cutting and tailoring business and now I can easily earn, support and feed my family members. I am thankful to the almighty for everything he has bestowed upon me.*

The majority of the respondents revealed that after joining the self-help groups they got an opportunity to attend various training programs from SHGs and have developed their skills such as cutting & tailoring, embroidery, cattle rearing, agricultural production, poultry, shops and computer training. They opined that these training programs are very useful and helped them not only in starting income-generating activities but also empowered them socially and economically.

#### **Financial Assistance.**

Microfinance institutions extend banking services to unemployed and low-income individuals or groups who lack access to traditional financial services. Within SHGs, these institutions provide financial assistance to underprivileged women. Typically, uneducated, impoverished, and jobless women struggle to obtain loans from conventional lending institutions, highlighting the crucial support provided by MFIs. The SHGs give loans to needy members in order to develop their own earning ways with low interest. In this connection Naseema begum, a widow narrates that *I have 3 children, and her husband died 10 years ago. After then I was totally dependent on my father & brothers again just like I was before marriage. But after marriage, now we are 4 members depending on them. I have faced many problems, as sometimes I sent my children to an orphanage, and I reside lonely for many years in my home. I felt ashamed every time to take something from my brother's home and hesitated to tell them about the times of emergency needs. But after joining the SHGs, it gives me new hope by providing a micro-credit facility. Accessibility to money gives me the strength to open a poultry farm. I started to buy chicks from markets and develop them at my home. As a result, I feel somehow economically independent and have also taken my own household expenses.*



### **Income**

The socioeconomic status of a family is primarily influenced by the individuals who earn within the family. If there is a majority of members earning and less dependent members that are to be regarded as a high-standard family in India. In the present society, the financial status of a person or family is closely associated to their class and status. So far as the members of SHGs of district Kupwara are concerned majority of the respondents were totally dependent on male members of the family whether they are husband, father or brother before joining the self-help groups.

*Against this backdrop, one respondent of SHGs namely Aameena begum, narrates; that she was financially dependent on her husband. As I faced various problems at home in terms of not fulfilling my personal and family needs as per my choice. I have to beg for money from my own partner and other members of the family. But after joining the SHGs I got training in income generating activity of cattle rearing i.e., how to rear domestic animals, how to increase milk production, how to make cheese, curd and butter etc. As a result, I am feeling now empowered economically and fulfilling their wishes and her children as per my own choice.*

### **Bank Accounts**

The SHGs work operate based on the guiding philosophy of saving first and credit later. Soon after the emergence of SHGs all members open a separate and common accounts in any bank and start saving small amounts of thrift according to group decisions per month. The majority of the respondents stated that before joining the SHGs they don't have any bank accounts in banks because of having neither personal income and nor having financial knowledge. But after joining the SHGs they were given the opportunity to open bank accounts in banks and trained them how to credit, debit and how use ATM machines. Now they are secretly saved their personal income and manage their own expenses as per their choice.

*As far as their money saving is concerned, Hamida begum narrates; before joining the self-help group, I had no bank account, so, I prefer to keep my money in the boxes hidden from other members of the family. But during the demonetization process, I was startled to learn that after a few days, all my money would become invalid this news confused and embarrassed*

*me but thanks to Self- help-groups that I now own my personal bank account where I can save my money without any fear of losing my hard-earned money or sharing anything about my personal income.*

### **Awareness**

SHGs are considered one of the significant programs to develop awareness among rural people. It develops the sense of women in many ways as, self-respect, self-dignity, self-recognition and basic rights of women. By becoming a member of SHGs a woman develops consciousness of how to become independent economically, how to access social and economic resources, and how to address health problems and get financial security. [Mukherjee, S. 2022](#) analysis that “Self-help groups sharpen the knowledge and awareness among women, opening their eyes to their vulnerabilities and violations of their rights. SHGs also enables women to reflect on their status and make informed decisions towards their dignity”).

The present study revealed that the respondents were unaware of the programs and policies for women's welfare and development. The study compared the situation of women before and after joining the self-help groups. It talks about the pathetic condition of women before joining self-help groups. However, after becoming the members of SHGs, they not only came to know about facilities and programs available for them but also how to protest and protect themselves from the exploitation that they have faced for many years. By becoming members of SHGs they were given training from time to time about how to become self-employed through bank linkages and entrepreneurial activities.

### **Role in Decision Making.**

SHGs empowered women to recognize and harness their inherent potential, foster the confidence to think and act independently, express their desires, endure challenges, communicate openly, and pursue their unique paths of growth and development ([Bonina, B, 2019](#)). So, after being members of self-help groups, all members were given an equal chance of being included in decision-making in matters of a group meeting, resolving problems, per month savings, and other issues. The data from the field illustrates that the majority of the respondents were not given equal chances in household decision-making before joining the SHGs. As they stated that they were regarded as having no knowledge about modern customs

and rituals as they are residing inside the four walls of their home. But after joining the SHGs, they got a chance to start some income-generating activities and during the group meeting they were given a platform to discuss their issues and problems, to express their views and opinions, to exchange their ideas, for the benefit of these groups. After earning their own income, now they were given equal opportunity in decision-making in the family as well as outside of the family because their social and economic status has been improved through SHGs. SHGs positively influence women by engaging them in household decision-making processes, where their viewpoints are valued and considered valid upon joining the group.

### **Freedom of Movement**

The majority of the respondents revealed that before joining the SHGs they were not allowed to go outside of their homes in order protect the privacy of their family issues and matters. With the formation of SHGs, they were given permission to join SHGs. they got an opportunity to move outside of their house to attend meetings and training. After joining, they got a chance to discuss their views and problems with other members and solved them in an ordered way. As one of the respondents namely *Mala begum narrates that before joining the SHGs, I was not allowed to go outside of my home without my husband's and in-laws' permission. But after joining the SHGs I got the chance to interact with my neighbors, relatives and officials, as a result, a good interaction developed with them. I am feeling happy after joining the SHGs as I got not only freedom of movement but also feeling relaxed in many ways. Finally, I came to know that only within the family a woman can't survive a better life, as many benefits of movement are outside of the home where we learn more and more day-to-day life activities.*

### **Conclusion:**

It is a widely acknowledged fact, that the people of the JK especially in northern Kashmir faced many challenges and problems due to conflict. It affected almost every part of society, but the major thrust was on the economy, education, health, living conditions, people's livelihood etc. Even the women folk was impacted to a considerable extent. As a result, the women of northern Kashmir were solely and wholly economically dependent upon their male members of families. The findings of the study revealed that the SHGs program has created a positive change among poor rural women after joining the SHGs. It was observed that the majority of the respondents

are engaged in different types of economic activities as a result they are feeling now economically independent and socially empowered on the basis of their personal income, decision-making power, leadership qualities, communication level, outlook and attitudes, saving and asset facilities after joining the SHGs. The availability of credit facilities is the main reason which boosts the capacity of women and their ability to develop their entrepreneurship skills. In the study area, the SHGs served as a cause of poverty reduction, development and women empowerment. Besides, there has been a significant change in their lives but there the need of the hour is to provide them with training from time to time and sensitize them about the main objectives of the microfinance programs.

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## rethinking the agency of women in inter- caste/religious marriage: a sociological analysis

Shahana

### Abstract

*Since the idea of marriage has been undergoing change, love marriages are also being increasing. In many urban settings, people have started marrying across caste and community. Knowing the fact that India is a patriarchal society, the situation has still not much changed with respect to Inter-caste/religious marriages. The caste and religious norms still dominate the everyday lives of individual. The authority to make the decision of marriage still rests with the patriarchal family majorly in the hands of male elder of the family. A lot of marriages result in social boycott or death-threat when it happens against the choice of the family. In this context, the paper interrogates how women are able to negotiate with the established norms around caste, patriarchy and religion in the context of urban Delhi. The paper explores how the rigid caste norms and religion shapes the everyday of individuals, especially in cases of women, and denying them the agency to choose their partners. It also shows how the sexuality and chastity of women has been linked with the caste, and questioned when she uses her agency in choosing her marital partner.*

Keywords: Marriage, Caste & Religion, Choice, Agency, Women's Sexuality

### Introduction:

The caste system and religion have historically ruled Indian communities, and these institutions have a significant impact on people's daily lives. In terms of marriage, religious norms and traditions have historically served as its foundation. In India, it is always preferred for people to marry within their own caste or religion. In sociology, a marriage is defined as a stable institution built on a sexual bond among two individuals and is seen as an enduring legal and social contract, as well as a partnership built on rights and obligations. Indian marriages are also distinguished by the fact that, for a very long time, family elders arranged marriages while taking each individual's caste and religious origins into consideration. Arranged marriages are thought to uphold the caste system by guaranteeing that the newly married couples are from the same caste and family.

In contrast, love marriages are primarily defined as "modern" unions that draw inspiration from the west (Allendorf, 2013, 2016).

Since, marriage in a different caste or community has not been a part of the prevalent norms of the society, therefore, any marriage taking place out of one's caste or community is considered as a deviation from the already established norms. According to research conducted in Delhi by Mody (2002), marriage is regarded as an occasion that sanctifies and embraces the bond between the boy and girl as husband and wife. Therefore, it doesn't matter if the couples are "in love." The Hindu marriage customs are based on the premise that the girl and the boy should be strangers to one another, and that their duty to their parents compels them to enter into marriage even though they are occasionally reluctant contributors (Mody 2002, pp.225).

In India, where patriarchy is deeply ingrained, men, particularly the male head of the household, make all of the decisions that influence people, particularly women. It is typical in most Indian families for the father to search for a suitable guy to marry his daughter, within the caste and religion, and the daughter is expected to comply with his decision. Considering this, it is generally considered inappropriate for women to decide on their own marriage or to disagree with their father's choices. In our society, the honour of the family is typically associated with women, thus, when a woman goes beyond the boundaries of caste and religion, it is considered as a breach in the family norms, and consequently a breach in the honour of community.

Therefore, the paper examines women's issues in relation to inter-caste and religious marriage. It focuses on how women are able to negotiate with the established norms of caste and religion and uses their agency in choosing their partners in marriage. What are the challenges a woman has to face when she wants to marry a person of her choice? Additionally, it examines how patriarchal forces have questioned women's sexuality when they make their own decisions, particularly when it comes to marriage. There are three major sections in the paper. In the context of India, the first section discusses the concept of marriage and its fundamental principles and how the everyday of individuals are based on the caste and religious norms. In the context of choice-based marriage, the second section explores the idea of women's agency and freedom, which have been restricted by the patriarchal family. The third section of the paper deals with the question of women's sexuality and how it has been questioned and controlled by the patriarchal Indian family. It explains how caste and familial traditions have shaped women's sexuality and how this has resulted in the surveillance of women's behavior since it is associated with the honour and purity of the caste group.



## 1. The Idea of Marriage & Its Governing Principles

There has been different rules and principles with regard to marriage in different societies that have undergone change but what is significant and common around most of the societies is the prevalence of endogamy. In the study of kinship organizations in different zones of India, Karve (1994) found that there is prevalence of hypergamy and kulinism. With regard to northern India Parveez Mody explained that although marriage is seen as a contract by Muslims, it is a holy and religious relationship among Hindus. Nonetheless, in each instance, a virgin girl's parents give her to a boy's family as a gift. (Mody, 2002, pp.224). Thus, the above literatures show that the prescribed rules of marriage among most of the societies rest within the community and the partners are chosen by the elder family members. Hence, the choice of spouse is limited with the family and community.

There have been studies that report an increase in the choice-based or love-marriages, but they are comparatively rare even in contemporary times. For example, Fruzzetti (2013) in her study shows how new relationships are essentially redefining the meaning of marriage from a sacred rite to a companionship and how they are challenging the older hierarchies. However, when we look at the debates over love and arranged marriages, studies show that love marriages are still not happily accepted everywhere. It is thought that an arranged marriage is based on a religious rite that is approved and sanctified by family and society. However, as they go against the established social structure of caste, love marriages are generally seen as the most unholy of unions. They are viewed as evil and antisocial (Mody 2002, pp.225-226). Allendorf, from her study in Delhi, also expressed the same view that arranged marriages are customary whereas, love- marriages are basically characterized as 'modern' and has influence of west (Allendorf, 2013, pp. 454).

According to Shalini Grover's research in rural Delhi, most weddings are "arranged" in order to maintain a family's reputation, social standing, and traditional kinship hierarchy. Elopement followed by a court marriage, along with family disruption, are characteristics of love marriages that are viewed as inferior. (Grover 2009, pp.9). Madhu Kishwar while talking about the binary between 'love marriage and arranged marriage' says that love marriages are better than other types of unions because they are founded on passion, mutual love, understanding, and compatibility. whereas arranged marriages are based on materialistic considerations. The arranged marriage system is frequently cited by feminists, socialists, and other radicals as one of the main causes of women's oppression in India. The transition from arranged to love weddings is considered as a crucial

step towards improving the situation of women in society. She adds that it leads to dowry-free marriages, which are portrayed as the way to a fulfilling marriage (Kishwar, 1994).

Religion and caste have always played important roles in Indian society. According to Ambedkar, these two systems produce thick walls between communities and social divides that may lead to hatred and violence between different social groupings. Caste division, not class separation, is the fundamental issue facing Indian society (Ambedkar, 2004). In Indian society, marriage between people from various castes and religions is a challenging and socially unacceptable idea and it is customary for members of the same caste and religion to marry. Having said that, he also propagated inter-caste marriages in India. He emphasized that caste differences will always result in discrimination of lower castes by the higher one. He also suggested that inter-dining and inter-marrying are the best possible ways to reduce this caste system from India.

Prem Chowdhry has demonstrated how caste and familial laws regulate women's sexuality in marriage in the context of northern India. She has also demonstrated how patriarchal pressures prioritize caste purity, caste position, power, and hierarchy. According to her research, it is widely held that a caste group derives its power, legitimacy, and influence in larger society and politics from the familial ties and relationships that result from arranged marriages. Hence, any breach of such caste ties lowers the status of the immediate family as well as that of the clan and, ultimately, the caste. Thus, in order to preserve their caste group and to regulate the sexual-codes, the preference of marriage lies within the community (Chowdhry, 1997, pp. 1019).

Thus, the patterns of marriage in Indian societies have been based on the customs and traditions of the community and society. Arranged marriages have been considered as 'customary' as the decision-making authority have always been rested with the family or community. Families exert a major influence on these marriages, restricting the autonomy and freedom of choice that women have when selecting a mate. However, in love marriages, individuals choose their spouses which may defy the traditions of caste endogamy (Chowdhry 2007). Due to women's increased agency, which the family and society want to control, love marriages and marriages in different castes or communities are not encouraged. The following portion of the study, therefore, goes into great depth about how women might exercise their agency when selecting a spouse.

## **2. Agency and Freedom**

The feeling of agency, which may be broadly defined as the awareness that one is the creator of one's acts and the outcomes that one experiences through the senses, is one of the most common characteristics of human

consciousness (Haggard and Tsakiris, 2009). In her work on 'Marriage, Violence, and Choice', The concept of agency has yet to be widely experienced by women in India since they have little authority to make decisions. Concerning women's empowerment and voice, Nitya Rao (2015) examined agency, voice, and intersectionality as core ideas in her research on "Marriage, Violence, and Choice," with a particular emphasis on the roles of "Marriage" and "Sexuality." She defines "agency" as "the capacity to act, make decisions, and exert influence".

In selecting a spouse for marriage, parents and other family members, especially men have a great deal of power. As a result, they can make choices on behalf of their offspring, especially daughters. They are restricting the agency (or authority) of women to act on their behalf by doing this, which in turn limits their capacity to act. When we look at the contradictions between love and arranged marriages, typically they are arranged by parents for their children which are then accepted as the norm (Chowdhry 2007, Allendorf, 2013). In this sense, women's activities are greatly influenced by patriarchal forces, which restrict their ability to exercise agency and freedom to choose partner. However, in love marriages, individuals choose their spouses which may defy the traditions of caste endogamy (Chowdhry 2007). Due to women's increased agency, which the family and society want to control, love marriages and marriages in different castes or communities are not encouraged.

In this context, it's important to talk about the concept of "freedom." According to a study in Bishnupur, Lina Fruzzetti found that occasionally, "freedom" equates to complete autonomy or the capacity to make decisions based only on one's own free will. Her research also reveals that women and girls place different emphasis on distinct aspects of freedom. For example, young women saw freedom as having male friends visit them at home or conversing with them unsupervised. Additionally, it suggests that women have the freedom to choose or the right to make their own decisions (Fruzzetti, 2013, pp. 104-130). In her study "Caste, Marriage, and Challenges to Traditional Rites," Fruzzetti (2013) concentrated on the debate involving inter-caste marriage. Her research also looks into the possibility of a relationship between women's increased freedom and choice and the rise in mixed marriages.

As per the traditional norms of Indian society, marriages have been arranged by the elders of the family, at times without the consent of women. Fruzzetti also reported that such cases of marriage mostly result in oppression of women as she doesn't have a say in her own marriage. Therefore, to avoid the abuse and victimization that is often associated with arranged marriages, young women take step towards choosing their partner themselves, against their religion or caste group. The study also argued that when the tradition does not

protect women, or when it results in violence and torture of women, women take it upon themselves to rectify the injustice (Fruzetti, 2013, pp. 104-130). Nonetheless, it is crucial to maintain that when it comes to unaccepted inter-caste or inter-religious marriages, women are the most vulnerable. A woman who decides to get married on her own forfeits the benefits of an arranged marriage, like having a place to call home and refuge, as well as the support of her parents (Grover, 2009). According to Thapan (2003), women's agency may not always be enough to help them achieve their desired results, even when they do use it. They may choose not to exercise agency due to the association of family honour with them, as they do not want to be seen as threatening their identities as married women or challenging family honour (Thapan, 2003). Under that, the following section discusses women's sexuality and the tendency for women to marry daughters from the same caste or religion to preserve the honour of the family while also defending their sexuality.

### **3. The Question of Women's Sexuality**

The protection of women's sexuality can be looked as another reason for marriages happening within the same caste or religion. When we talk about women's sexuality and chastity, it is being controlled by the patriarchal society through marriage. Marriage, as an institution, restricts and also allows having sexual relations and due to this reason, families object their children to have love-affairs before marriage. This question has also been explored by Jyoti Puri (2002) in her work on 'women, Body and Desire in post-colonial India'. According to the study, it is prescribed by the cultural upbringing of women that her chastity can be ensured and protected through marriage. It also argues that a community always attaches its respect and purity with the women's body and that is what needs to be protected in order to prevent the entire caste from being polluted (Puri, 2002).

Uma Chakravarti (1993) in her paper on Brahmanical patriarchy argued on a similar ground. She also contended that in order to safeguard caste-purity, women's sexuality is important to be protected because they are the one who act like a 'gateway' (Das, 1976). As the caste purity and women's sexuality is inherently connected, it needs to be policed and protected. There is a feeling of pride that people attach with their caste and status of which Janaki Abraham (2014) talks about in her work while looking at the shifts in endogamy. The control over women's sexuality gives the caste power and privilege to preserve the caste-status.

The notions like 'caste-purity' and 'pollution' still prevail and followed. In her work in New Delhi, Parveen Mody talks about the myth which has been prevailed in the society that the blood of one caste will be polluted after marrying in another caste, which is ultimately linked to the chastity of woman. Hence, it is important to

stop marrying into different caste or religion (Mody, 2002). Leela Dube (1997), in her study of 'Women and Kinship' has also explored the question of 'female-sexuality' with respect to marriage. Here she says that, it is the perception of people to equate women's sexuality with their reproductive power, and here lies the purity of the respective caste. Therefore, in order to control the purity of the 'caste', women need to be controlled and hence, should be married in the same caste (Dube,1997, pp.49-59).

The notion of *izzat* (honour) differs for men and women. For men, *izzat* lies in the maintaining and defending the honor of the patrilineage from external threats—whether they come from the political, familial, or religious spheres. However, it is rooted in women's "shyness" and "shame" of female sexuality, which undermines and controls a woman's sexual desire (Mody, 2008, pp.198). The ideas of purity and pollution are also different for men and women. It is said that engaging in sex with someone from a different caste pollutes a woman internally while polluting a man externally. In addition, a young lady is supposed to stay pure and virtuous until she is ready for marriage. The word "unopened-flower," is used to describe a young, single woman, emphasizes the importance of women's virginity more than that of males (Dube 1997).

According to Mody's research, the widely held Brahmanical belief that a woman can only be married once and that a man can only ever experience her sexuality once per person is still highly widespread in Delhi even today. However, it's not unheard of for a high-caste Hindu man to marry a "virgin" in a second marriage. (Mody, 2008, pp.219). According to Nitya Rao, women's labor, both reproductive and productive, and sexuality, especially bridal virginity, are being regulated more and more on a regular basis. The economic and political structure of communities also closely links "marriage" as a means of regulating reproduction, guaranteeing paternity, and preserving cultural diversity. Hence, any departure from caste conventions provokes violent reactions directed not only at the transgressor but also at the caste as a whole (Rao, 2015).

Thus, the discussion above on women's sexuality in general and the institution of marriage in particular, makes it evident that a woman is more vulnerable in such a patriarchal set up as she carries the responsibility of keeping the blood pure. Also, the belief that sexual intercourse with a man of different caste/religion results in polluting the man externally but ends up polluting the women internally highlights the fact that how important the virginity of a girl is when it comes to maintain the purity of a caste hence justified for being under constant surveillance and protection by the men of their communities. Therefore, women's sexuality and chastity are ultimately controlled by the patriarchal society and simultaneously also by the institution of marriage.

### Conclusion

The agency of a girl/woman has been controlled in all the spheres of life, be it going for higher education or choosing partner for marriage. When we talk about agency and freedom, then in case of women it can be said that it comes as a second-hand experience because parents always come up to act or decide on the behalf of their daughters. This can be seen at the time of arranged marriages as they are based on family's dominant influence, that restrict the options available to the family especially the male elder. Thus, women have no or very little authority in making choice regarding her own marriage. In cases of inter-caste and inter-religious marriage, the family attempts to keep control over the individual's agency, especially that of the daughter, in order to uphold caste endogamy. Many literatures show that love-marriages are on rise though are not happily welcomed. This shows that individual's have started taking decision for their marriage and using their agency. However, when someone goes beyond the norms of society, and marries in a different caste or religion, it is considered as a deviation and results in non-acceptance. They are considered as unholy, non-customary, and disrupt the caste reputation and social standing in society.

The family members and community impose its norms on an individual's choice that the aspects like love, respect, companionship and most importantly the individual's choice have not been given much importance. The institution of family and marriage act as a governing body which control and regulate the activities of the individuals and make sure that the norms are followed. The idea of purity and pollution still dominated the mind of people that they do not let children marry beyond the caste group. Women are still considered as a commodity which is to be given by one family to another and hence, her sexuality and virginity must be protected. The woman is held responsible for keeping the caste pure and hence she is put into surveillance by the family. When she uses her agency and takes decision for her marriage, her sexuality is questioned and it is considered as a deviation. In such a scenario, many women have to face forced marriage.

When it comes to choosing a partner, Indian societies have so strictly enforced and obeyed the established conventions and norms of a caste that other important factors like education and employment have received little thought. When women choose to marry outside of their caste or religion, it causes them suffering and is still viewed as a deviation from the norm. For family members, especially elders, such an act brings shame and dishonor in the family and disrupts its social standing. Therefore, in order to uphold caste norms, women's actions have been monitored. Women thus lack agency and the freedom to make their own decisions, even in this day and age, 75 years after India gained its independence. The vulnerability and precarity of a woman

when she tries to use her agency and makes decision for her marriage is less highlighted in research on inter-caste/community marriages. This paper attempts to visualize the situation of women who have been restricted to use agency and has been put into surveillance in order to keep the caste/blood pure.

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## India's Post-2001 Engagement in Afghanistan: Contributions to Reconstruction and Strategic Considerations

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### Abstract

*This paper provides a holistic understanding of the Indo-Afghan relationship, offering insights into its historical depth, contemporary challenges, and the prospects for future cooperation. It will also highlight India's post-2001 role in Afghanistan, detailing its multifaceted contributions to reconstruction and development, particularly in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The evolving nature of India's engagement, from the post-Taliban era to the present, is analyzed, shedding light on the strategic considerations that have shaped India's approach. The paper also examines Pakistan's historical influence in Afghanistan and its impact on regional dynamics, emphasizing India's diplomatic and development-oriented strategy in contrast to Pakistan's approach.*

**Keywords:** Indo-Afghan, Bi-lateral Relationship, Taliban

### Introduction

The South Asian region is undergoing a profound transformation, marked by geopolitical shifts, economic developments, and evolving security dynamics (Shambaugh 2005, 25; Cook et al. 2010, 32). Against this backdrop, the relationship between India and Afghanistan stands out as a crucial element that not only reflects the changing geopolitical landscape but also plays a pivotal role in shaping the region's future. India's historical ties with Afghanistan, rooted in shared cultural affinities and economic interests, have gained renewed significance in the context of evolving regional challenges (Wani 2022, pp. 617-633)). As Afghanistan navigates a complex post-conflict phase, and neighboring powers recalibrate their strategies, the bilateral relationship between India and Afghanistan becomes central to regional stability and prosperity.

The enduring importance of India-Afghanistan relations transcends bilateral interests and holds broader implications for international relations (Yousuf 2023, pp. 343-361). This paper seeks to investigate the multifaceted dimensions of the India-Afghanistan partnership, examining its

historical foundations, contemporary challenges, and prospects. As the regional landscape witnesses' transformations, it is imperative to understand how these changes impact the strategic dynamics between India and Afghanistan and, consequently, the broader regional balance of power. This paper aims to address key questions in international relations, such as the role of regional partnerships in shaping global geopolitics, the impact of security dynamics on economic cooperation, and the strategic imperatives that drive state interactions in a changing world order. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex web of relationships that define the contemporary international system.

### **Situating the Theme**

The historical nexus between the denizens of India and Afghanistan finds its roots in the venerable Indus Valley civilization (Schweitzer 2013, 15). After the transitory sojourn of Alexander, the Great, the Seleucid Empire, in its capacity as the successor state, asserted dominion over the territory now recognized as Afghanistan (Holt 2012, 190). In 305 BCE, a notable portion of this domain was relinquished to the Indian Mauryan Empire according to a bilateral alliance treaty. During the latter part of the 2nd century BCE, Afghanistan bore the indelible imprints of diverse cultural influences, including those of Buddhists, Hindus, and adherents of Zoroastrianism (Ahloowalia 2009, pp. 73-85). This cultural amalgamation persisted until the advent of Islam in the 7th century, marking a transformative epoch in the region's socio-cultural tapestry (Panakkal 2024, pp. 86-117). Despite the widespread conversion of many Afghans to Islam, cohabitation between Muslim and Hindu communities endures. The collective memory of the Indian populace reverberates with gratitude for the support extended by Afghans during the struggle for independence (Virdee 2018, 105). The laudable contributions of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan stand as a testament to this shared history (Sattar 2010, pp. 133-138). Furthermore, a pivotal juncture in this historical narrative occurred a century ago, with the establishment of the first Indian Government in exile in Kabul, orchestrated by Maharaja Maharana Pratap and Maulana Barkatullah (Khan and Amin 2015, pp. 3-9). This diplomatic and historical landmark underscores the enduring ties between India and Afghanistan, transcending temporal and geopolitical shifts.

The historical ties between India and Afghanistan, dating back to the 1950 Treaty of Friendship, illustrate a deep cultural and political connection. Afghanistan's early support for Indian nationalists, exemplified by figures like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, once made it a beacon of hope for India. However, subsequent crises, including Soviet invasion and Taliban rule, have reshaped bilateral relations. Today, these ties remain dynamic, influenced by regional stability and historical legacies (Zaidi 2022, pp. 205-210; Jalali 2017, 315; Shah 1999, 51; Roy 2015, 35; Jain 2010, 85; Goodson 2001, 13). India's relationship with Afghanistan underwent significant changes, notably in the 1990s with the rise of the Taliban. Initially refraining from recognizing Taliban rule, India later aligned with the U.S.-led efforts post-9/11, providing substantial aid for Afghanistan's reconstruction (Basu 2007, pp. 84-122; Paliwal 2017, 35-67). The strategic value of Afghanistan, including its position as a gateway to resource-rich Central Asian nations, has driven India's interest in positive regional alliances (Ejaz 2012, 118; Vijayalakshmi 2017, 45; Foshko 2012, 35; Bajoria 2009, pp. 1-3).

### **Economic Relations**

India and Afghanistan share deep economic ties, with bilateral trade reaching US\$ 1.5 billion in 2019-20 (Ghosh 2013; Menon 2021, 105). Overcoming transit challenges through Pakistan, the India-Afghanistan Air-Freight Corridor, established in 2017, has facilitated goods worth over USD 216 million (Mansuri 2021, 27; Kachiar 2021, pp. 262-275). The operational Chabahar Port has further bolstered trade, handling significant volumes of agricultural and mineral products, showcasing its potential as a vital transit point (Pradhan, Rathi, & Gupta 2022, 215; Amin, Dwivedi, & Sharma 2015, 22).

Building on the successes of the first and subsequent editions of the India-Afghanistan Trade & Investment Show, known as 'Passage to Prosperity,' held in New Delhi in September 2017 and Mumbai in September 2018, the third installment occurred from September 24 to 26, 2019, in Delhi (Narayan, Tursonov, and Kumar 2018, 85). Consistent with its predecessors, the exhibition was organized in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The event saw active participation from 105 Afghan enterprises, and notably, formal agreements worth

US\$ 33.6 million were signed, with discussions on pre-contract arrangements amounting to US\$ 23.3 million (Bajoria 2009, 2). On September 28, 2017, Dr. Abdullah inaugurated the India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show. This significant event served as a crucial platform for highlighting trade and investment opportunities within Afghanistan. Beyond merely showcasing commercial prospects, the exhibition also led to substantial economic transactions, totaling US\$ 250 million. The event played a vital role in enhancing Business-to-Business (B2B) connections between India and Afghanistan, thereby strengthening their bilateral ties in the commercial sector (Bajoria 2009, 2).

The significant impact of the exhibition was evident in the increased recognition of the substantial potential in bilateral trade. Furthermore, it highlighted the strengthening and advancement of commercial ties between India and Afghanistan. Notable Indian companies actively involved in the Afghan market include distinguished entities like KEC, specializing in Electrical Transmission Lines; Phoenix, providing consultancy services in Electrical Transmission; AIPL, participating in the establishment of a Hydro Power Project in Hilmand Province; APTECH, focusing on Computer and Management Education; GAMMON INDIA, involved in Power Transmission Lines and Power Sub-stations; KPTL, specializing in Power Transmission Lines; ANAAR GROUP (AIR INDIA GSA); and Spice Jet (Damodaran 2008, 35). This collaborative economic endeavor signifies the mutually beneficial relationship between India and Afghanistan, promoting shared growth and development through strategic business initiatives.

### **Cultural Relations**

In recent years, cultural exchange efforts between India and Afghanistan have gained considerable prominence, characterized by collaborative events featuring artists and musical groups. A notable example is the "India-Afghanistan Culture Week" held in New Delhi in November 2017, organized in collaboration with the India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) (Mansuri 2021, 29). Furthermore, cultural interactions between India and Afghanistan have been emphasized through significant occasions, including a visit to Kabul in September 2017 by a troupe led by Smt. Kumud Diwan (Mansuri 2021, 32). Additionally, the 'Awayee Band-e-Amir,' a folk musical ensemble from Bamiyan Province, played an active role in

the 5th International Folk Music and Dance Festival organized by the ICCR, held in New Delhi in December 2018 (Shastri and Bhatt 2018). Another notable cultural exchange took place with the visit of a three-member instrumental 'Sarod' group led by Shri Avijit Ghosh in October 2019 (Indian Council for Cultural Relations 2019-2020).

Beyond artistic engagements, collaborative efforts between the two governments resulted in the establishment of the India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) in 2007 (D'Souza 2011, pp. 1-11). This foundation serves as a testament to the enduring cultural ties and diplomatic relations between the two countries (Haque and Avcu 2024, 15). Operating as a trust fund, the India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) backs initiatives focused on fostering bilateral relations through collaboration in economic, scientific, educational, technical, and cultural spheres. The governance of the Foundation is overseen by a 10-member Board of Directors, with the Co-Chairpersons being the Ambassador of India to Afghanistan in Kabul and the Ambassador of Afghanistan to India in New Delhi. The remaining eight members are nominated by their respective governments. The 12th Board Meeting of the India Afghanistan Foundation took place in August 2019 at the Kabul Chapter, involving a comprehensive assessment of the Foundation's activities and the consideration of new proposals from both chapters.

India and Afghanistan have developed strong diplomatic ties in sports since 2011, with Afghan teams participating in the Subroto Cup International Tournament and securing cricket home grounds in India (Haque and Avcu 2024, 17). India has also supported Afghanistan in cricket infrastructure development and hosted significant matches, including the inaugural India-Afghanistan test match in 2018 and a bilateral series in 2019. Corporate sponsorship from Indian companies like Amul has further boosted Afghanistan's cricket initiatives on the global stage (Haque and Avcu 2024, 21).

### **Indo-Afghan New Development Partnership**

Since 2005, India and Afghanistan have collaborated in community development through the High Impact Community Development Program (HICDP). A dedicated fund of US\$ 120 million has

been allocated to implement various small to medium-scale projects across sectors such as education, health, water management, government infrastructure, sports facilities, agriculture, and irrigation. Notably, 433 High Impact Community Development Projects, financially supported by India, have been completed in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, with 110 projects currently underway across different provinces (Mansuri 2021, 40). An example of ongoing commitment occurred on July 5, 2020, when India officially signed five agreements totaling US\$ 2.6 million, primarily focused on the construction of schools and roads. In the fiscal year 2019-20, 37 projects were successfully completed in diverse provinces of Afghanistan under the High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP) initiative by the Government of India (Mansuri 2021, 42).

India's dedication to enhancing human resource development and capacity building in Afghanistan is a crucial aspect of its bilateral assistance efforts. Each year, a significant group of more than 3,500 Afghan nationals participates in various training and educational programs facilitated by India. This is complemented by the proactive pursuit of education by over 15,000 Afghan students in India, funding their studies through self-financing (Rahim 2020, pp. 33-46). This collective endeavor has resulted in the creation of a commendable pool of skilled professionals, contributing significantly to the development of both public and private sectors in Afghanistan.

India's multifaceted approach to support Afghanistan encompasses various strategic initiatives. One significant example is the rehabilitation of Habibia School in Kabul, where India not only facilitated physical reconstruction but also provided ongoing support for training and maintenance. The Special Scholarship Scheme, overseen by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, highlights India's commitment to education in Afghanistan, offering 1,000 scholarships annually with full utilization (Rahim 2020, pp. 33-46). Additionally, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program allocates over 1,000 slots yearly, addressing Afghanistan's need to strengthen administrative and governance capacities at various levels. India's contribution to agricultural sciences extends to establishing the Afghanistan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University, supported by the Indian Agriculture Research Institute (Rahim 2020, pp. 33-46). The India-Afghanistan Agricultural Fellowship Programme further fosters academic collaboration. At

the same time, technical expertise in the mining sector is reinforced through the graduation of nearly 50 Afghan students from the Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, aligning with Afghanistan's sustainable development goals. India's steadfast engagement in human resource development and capacity building in Afghanistan reflects a nuanced and comprehensive strategy to foster long-term socio-economic development and sustainability in the region.

### **India's Role in Post-2001**

Following the removal of the Taliban regime in 2001, India reestablished its embassy in Afghanistan. In the early 1990s, India had reduced its presence in response to the escalating conflict among Mujahideen groups (Jha 2015, pp. 92-107). The embassy had shut down in 1996 as the Taliban advanced towards Kabul. In conjunction with Iran and Russia, India provided support to the Northern Alliance, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, in resisting the Taliban from the Panjshir Valley. The hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC814 in December 1999, diverted to Kandahar, led to prolonged negotiations with the Taliban, intensifying anti-Taliban sentiments in India (Gurzi 2000, 5). Throughout the 1990s, there was an increase in cross-border infiltration of trained militants into Kashmir.

Following the post-Taliban period, India found a favorable environment with key leaders of the Northern Alliance assuming prominent roles. Despite not being a conventional donor, India emerged as Afghanistan's most substantial regional development partner. Over a span of two decades, it pledged almost US\$3 billion (S\$4.08 billion) for humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, and the rebuilding of governance capacities. Significant projects included the provision of one million tons of wheat, reconstruction of hospitals, operation of medical camps for prosthetics and surgeries, contributions to power transmission lines, road connectivity, a hydropower project, a machine tool workshop, television systems, a new parliament building, and cold storage units for agricultural produce (Sood 2021, pp. 1-6). India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan since the US invasion in 2001. Its involvement has been diverse, covering sectors such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and more. India stands out as one of the largest contributors of foreign aid to Afghanistan, providing assistance through grants, loans, and investments in various projects aimed at rebuilding the war-

torn nation. These projects span from the construction of roads and highways to the establishment of schools and hospitals. An essential aspect of India's engagement in Afghanistan has been its emphasis on infrastructure development. Notable investments include projects like the Zaranj-Delaram highway, the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul, and the Salma Dam in Herat (Sood 2021, pp. 1-6). These initiatives contribute to the country's reconstruction, enhance connectivity, and support economic activities. India has also extended support to improve healthcare facilities in Afghanistan, involving initiatives such as the provision of medical aid, training for healthcare professionals, and the construction of hospitals and clinics. These efforts aim to enhance the overall well-being of the Afghan population. India's commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction has earned it significant goodwill among the Afghan people, strengthening diplomatic ties between the two nations. India's strategic approach in Afghanistan has primarily focused on non-military initiatives, prioritizing development, and nation-building. This nuanced strategy has resonated positively among the Afghan populace, reflecting the effectiveness of India's dedication to fostering socio-economic progress and stability in the region.

### **Pakistan's Afghan Policy**

Pakistan's foreign policy framework heavily relies on India's approach to Afghanistan. Since the former's independence in 1947, bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have generally been tense, a situation that many credit to Indian influence in Afghanistan from the beginning. India and Afghanistan began strengthening their bilateral ties on January 4, 1950, when they signed the Friendship Treaty (Ali 2022, 508; Kaleem et al. 2023, 52). With a few brief hiccups along the way, their connections have been maintained relatively successfully over the years. Even in times when Pakistan held more sway over India, like the Soviet Afghan war, Delhi made investments in projects related to irrigation, agriculture, and hydropower to "maintain its influence in Afghanistan. Conversely, Afghanistan had begun advocating for the incorporation of Pashtun-dominated regions in Pakistan shortly after the establishment of Pakistan. This issue persisted as a source of tension for Pakistan from the 1950s through the late 1970s (Ali 2022, 510; Kaleem et al. 2023, 54). During the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan's Afghan policy predominantly centered around the pursuit of the widely cited 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan, aiming to counter the longstanding



alliance between Afghanistan and India (Kaleem et al. 2023, 55). By assisting the Baloch insurgents and advancing the notion of a larger Pashtunistan, this alliance had been causing problems for Pakistan. Pakistan had the chance to oppose Soviet and Indian influences in Afghanistan and work toward establishing a friendly government there because of the Soviet invasion of that country and the Soviet Afghan war (1979–1989) (Kaleem et al. 2023, 56).

Pakistan's support for Afghan Islamist groups during the Soviet-Afghan War was driven more by strategic interests than ideology, according to analysts (Kaleem et al. 2023, 57). Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto noted differences among mujahideen factions, with General Zia favoring hard-liners. Pakistan aimed to cultivate specific factions for influence in post-war Afghanistan, countering India's ties with Kabul. India, initially opposing Soviet intervention, later shifted due to fears of mujahideen victory aligning with Pakistan's interests. India's focus on Kashmir affected its engagement with Afghanistan during the Najibullah regime and the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s (Kaleem et al. 2023, 59).

Additionally, India sought to contribute to Afghanistan's economic well-being within its capabilities. However, India faced challenges in implementing its policies due to civil strife and violence. India had to close its embassy in Kabul multiple times due to the unstable situation, especially during heavy shelling in and around the city (Batabyal 2011, 210). However, despite these difficulties, India continued to work towards building a positive relationship with Afghanistan and played a crucial role in contributing to its economic development. Conversely, certain segments of the Afghan population hold Pakistan responsible for imposing the Taliban on their nation and facilitating a harsh regime that particularly oppresses women under the guise of Islam. Their preference for India over Pakistan extends beyond economic assistance (Bashir 2023, 105). Despite Pakistan providing more aid to Afghanistan on a per capita basis than India, it has failed to garner political goodwill. This failure in Pakistan's Afghanistan policy has inadvertently allowed India the opportunity to potentially establish a strategic advantage, creating a two-front situation against Pakistan.

## Conclusion

India and Afghanistan have a long and complex history, marked by cultural ties, economic collaborations, and geopolitical considerations. India has played a significant role in Afghanistan's development through various aid programs, infrastructure projects, and capacity-building initiatives. Both nations share common concerns, such as combating terrorism and promoting regional stability. However, the Indo-Afghan relationship is also influenced by other neighboring countries. The current political situation in Afghanistan has added a layer of uncertainty to the relationship. India's approach has been pragmatic, focusing on diplomatic engagement and constructive partnerships to navigate the challenges and opportunities in the region. The Indo-Afghan relationship reflects a blend of historical connections and contemporary geopolitical realities. Continued cooperation, mutual understanding, and concerted efforts to address shared challenges can further strengthen the ties between the two nations. The future trajectory will likely be shaped by the evolving dynamics in the region and both countries' ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

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## **The Silent Male: A Critical Examination of Human Rights of Male Victims of Sexual Harassment at Workplace in India**

**Sherry Pant**

**Krishna Aggarwal**

### **Abstract**

*The prevalence of sexual harassment at the workplace is an international concern that affects both men and women equally simultaneously affecting a multitude of human rights. Sexual harassment has always been an issue, yet debates and legal frameworks have mostly ignored the cries of those who are male, maintaining an environment of indifference and ignorance. Male victims of sexual harassment also face prejudices from society that label them as 'unmanly' if they report the sexual harassment incidence, which attributes to them not coming forward for redressal. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 brought about significant changes to the legal environment in India regarding sexual harassment. While this law proved to be an important first step in making the workplace safer for women, it also perpetuates the stereotype that sexual harassment is primarily a problem that affects women, hence contributing to the already existing disparity between genders in this area. Even the latest penal law introduced, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 overlooks the concern at hand.*

*This research paper aims to examine existent laws and regulations from the perspectives of gender-neutrality and inclusivity of law. The present study also endeavours to suggest legislative and policy measures to render all workplaces more welcoming and safe for people of all genders, and to encourage an atmosphere where those who have endured sexual harassment can come forth optimistically and receive justice without encountering more discrimination.*

**Keywords :** gender justice, sexual harassment of males, gender-neutrality, gender inclusivity, human rights

## I. Introduction

The conception of gender in one's mind is influenced by his or her culture, race, nationality, socioeconomic status, culture, physical capacity, and other societal aspects. Gender roles in many south Asian countries, particularly India, are strictly enforced. Such a dogmatic outlook helps perpetuate sexism and other forms of discrimination, which are reflected in the laws of the country. Such legislation reinforces the problem of gender bias. Thus, it becomes important to assess the impact of laws on the movement towards gender parity and gender justice in society. Laws that are deemed to be gender-neutral openly and covertly ignore the power imbalances and various gender-stereotypes that give rise to gender-discrimination. This scrutiny is all the more important in a society where the roles of men and women are stereotypically set in stone, with women being instantly branded as victims and men as perpetrators. Gender-neutral laws make everyone in the community acknowledge that people of both sexes can be victims of sexual assault. They advocate for the widespread awareness that sexual assault is an issue for people of both sexes.

### Sexual Harassment

As a widespread and upsetting problem, sexual harassment is experienced by people everywhere they go, from the office, to the classroom, to the streets. Sexual harassment can have devastating effects on its victims, which can take many forms such as verbal or physical comments or actions that are sexually suggestive (O'Donohue 1998, 111). Thus any unwanted sexual behaviour that upsets, frightens, offends, or humiliates another person is considered sexual harassment. Cooper classifies the sexual harassment of women in the workplace by men into six distinct forms (Edmund 1991, 371). The categories being as follows :

- *Aesthetic appreciation :*

This category includes such remarks that are intended to convey a positive appreciation of a person's physical or sexual attributes in a manner that is not hostile.

- *Active mental groping :*

Direct verbal harassment, which plainly includes making sexual jokes about an employee, is considered to fall under this category. In addition to this, it entails employees staring at one another in a manner that gives the impression that the other person is 'undressing them with their eyes'. The 'social touching' was also featured in the second category.



- *Foreplay harassment :*

In this category, the inappropriateness of the touching is still hidden, but the same is not innocent in nature, i.e. a physical contact that clearly exceeds acceptable boundaries of behaviour.

- *Sexual Abuse :*

Physical or verbal sexual abuse is likely present in any situation where sexual harassment exists. It indicates that abuse has occurred when someone has been the victim of someone else's willful or careless actions that resulted in unwarranted injury.

- *Ultimate Threat :*

This category refers to instances of sexual assault characterised by direct physical injury inflicted against the victim, or the utilisation of threats of violence as a way to coerce compliance.

### **Extent of Sexual Harassment in Indian society**

The number of complaints received by the NCW grew significantly from 30,864 in 2021 to 30,957 in 2022 and stood at 28,811 in 2023. According to the NCW data (Annual Report, 2022-23), out of a total of 30,957 complaints, the most common were domestic violence at around 6,274 cases and dowry harassment around 4,797 cases. The most common complaint was the right to live with dignity, which are inclusive of 605 of cyber crime complaints, 805 complaints of sexual harassment and 472 cases of stalking.

The most populated state, Uttar Pradesh, accounted for almost 55 per cent, i.e. 16,109 of the complaints. The state with the most complaints was Maharashtra with 1,381, followed by Bihar with 1,368 cases and Haryana with 1,362 cases.

Currently in India, there is a lack of empirical evidence that quantifies the prevalence of sexual harassment instances specifically targeting males. This highlights a substantial deficiency in the gathering and documenting of such occurrences. Therefore, comprehending the complete extent and frequency of sexual harassment encountered by men becomes difficult. The absence of such data can be attributed to multiple factors, such as societal stigma, underreporting by male victims, and inadequate attention given to the male group in sexual harassment studies and surveys. As a result, governments, researchers, and advocacy groups are unable to create specific policies and initiatives to effectively support male victims. Although there is a lack of quantifiable information, it is crucial to recognize that males can and do encounter sexual harassment, and their experiences are legitimate and significant.

## II. Sexual Harassment Laws in India: A Gendered Perspective

India's dedication to protection of an individual is evident in its Constitution and other laws enacted after the nation acquired independence (Ashutosh 1992, 227). Initiated throughout the course of the previous few decades, numerous programmes, policies, and strategies aim to promote individual's health, independence, and advancement in all fields. Since its inception, the Indian government has undertaken an analysis of the existing legal framework from a feminist perspective, resulting in the enactment of various legislations aimed at safeguarding and acknowledging the rights of women. The current status of Indian women with respect to the existence of comprehensive legislation addressing sexual harassment has significantly improved due to the enactment of The *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013*, and the subsequent amendments in the Indian Penal Code, 1860 which have not only expanded the range of sexual offences covered but have also broadened the definition of rape. Regrettably, this phenomenon results in the manifestation of discriminatory practices towards men and individuals who identify as transgender, who have comparable challenges.

### Recognition of Male as a Victim of Sexual Harassment

It is frequently recognised that the interpersonal aspect that characterises the concept of sexual harassment is left out of the prevalent legal and philosophical interpretations of the term. There is no denying the worldwide rise in crimes committed against women, but it is equally true that such crimes are also committed against men. The fact that male victims of crime and social injustice are often overlooked is unfair (Julie 2016, 105). There exists a fair share of population who thinks that sexual harassment can't happen to men and any such incident if reported, is such a shocking occurrence for them. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in instances of domestic violence, wherein individuals who have experienced abuse frequently exhibit hesitancy in reporting their experiences, primarily driven by apprehension of potential humiliation or a lack of credibility. Moreover, it is frequently seen that male individuals who fall victim to criminal acts have a dearth of equitable access to assistance and resources, exacerbating the problem at hand.

When looking at sexual harassment from a gendered perspective, the act only acknowledges the role that gendered power dynamics, stereotypes, and social norms play in the phenomenon and its implications (Sandy 1999, 169). This approach blatantly ignores that men face sexual harassment too. In the context of sexual harassment laws, there is a prevailing perception that women tend to be positioned as victims, while

men are often portrayed as perpetrators. This attribution is in contravention of the Constitutional provisions in India which tend to safeguard equal protection and due process rights for all those affected.

### **Why are 'Men' Ignored by the Law and Society?**

- *Gender norms and stereotypes*

Gender stereotyping refers to the act of attributing specific features and distinctions to an individual based purely on their gender. Most men significantly experience verbal sexual harassment in the form of deliberate misgendered language or the use of homophobic or transphobic slurs. The conventional characterization of a male entails possessing dominance within their respective domain, exhibiting fierce competitiveness, and maintaining emotional detachment, particularly in relation to other males. In case of reporting of any event involving their sexual harassment, they are expected not to cry and 'act like a man'.

- *Ignorance of the acts of sexual harassment by victims*

Men may exhibit a hesitancy to acknowledge their status as 'victim' of sexual harassment due to concerns about being perceived as lacking in strength or vulnerability (O'Connell, et al. 2000, 299). In Indian society, there exists a prevailing mindset that perceives femininity as a position of lesser strength. Consequently, this perception can create challenges for men in acknowledging instances of sexual harassment, as they may fear being stigmatised as having adopted feminine attributes.

- *Lack of awareness*

Male victims of harassment often feel their accounts are being called into doubt because of society's refusal to acknowledge that males are vulnerable and the belief that women cannot be offenders. This belief makes them fear that their accusations will be dismissed. Many people do automatically discount sexual harassment claims that against a woman because they believe it is impossible for a woman to be the aggressor.

### **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**

The *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013* was enacted in December 2013 with the aim of preventing, prohibiting, and addressing instances of sexual harassment targeting women inside professional environments (Sukhraj 2018, 24). The legislation is devoid

of gender-neutrality because it solely covers and affords protection to female employees. It is imperative for every organisation to prioritise the provision of a supportive and secure work environment for its employees and other stakeholders. Similarly, it is imperative for the organisation to prioritise the establishment of a conducive work environment that demonstrates respect for gender diversity and recognises the equitable contributions of employees from all genders as active participants, catalysts for transformation, and effective leaders. But, the present legislation combating sexual harassment manifestly ignores the cries of male victims. As a result of the lack of recourse from both societal and legal avenues, numerous adult male individuals who have experienced sexual assault or any type of sexual harassment often experience feelings of guilt and self-doubt. These feelings arise from the belief that they should have possessed sufficient strength to resist their assailant, or from the understanding that their voices would not be acknowledged or taken seriously if they were to speak out. In fact, they anticipate being subjected to ridicule and shame rather than receiving support.

Under the provisions of the *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*, only women are granted the privilege to file complaints.

### **The Indian Penal Code, 1860**

- *Section 354-A*

Section 354A of the Indian Penal Code deals with the offence of sexual harassment and its corresponding penalties. The aforementioned section exclusively identifies males as potential offenders, while its wording does not imply that only females can be victims under Section 354-A. Indeed, it has been established through judicial precedents (*Anamika vs. Union of India & Ors.*, 2018) that transgender women have the ability to lodge complaints under the Act. However, it is important to highlight that the Act has not undergone formal amendment to explicitly include this advancement. Consequently, for the time being, individuals who identify as males or transgender-males are not recognised as potential victims within the scope of section 354-A.

- *Section 377*

According to Section 377 of IPC, it is illegal to engage in any carnal intercourse against the order of nature, the provision penalises homosexual sexual intercourse and thus for decades, members of the LGBTQ+ community had argued that Section 377 was discriminatory. In 2018, in the case of

Navtej Singh Johar vs. UOI, the Supreme Court read down section 377 on the grounds that labelling 'consensual' sexual intercourse between people of the same sex as an 'unnatural offence' infringes on the equal protection principle of Article 14 of the Constitution. Thus under the current laws prevailing in India, a male who suffered non-consensual sexual intercourse at the hands of a male can bring charges under section 377.

- *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, enacted in 2012, represents a pivotal legal development in India dedicated to safeguarding children from sexual abuse (Naik, et al. 2021, 66). This legislation acknowledges the vulnerability of children and recognizes various forms of sexual offences against them. The POCSO Act provides a comprehensive framework for the legal proceedings, including child-friendly procedures and stringent penalties for offenders. Importantly, it emphasises the need for the sensitive treatment of child victims during the legal process, with a focus on their well-being and rehabilitation. This legislation reflects a commitment to creating a protective environment for children, acknowledging their rights and ensuring justice in cases of sexual offences.

### **University Grants Commission (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2015**

The *University Grants Commission (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2015* have a gender-inclusive stance, providing safeguards for individuals of all genders, encompassing males and those who identify as belonging to the third gender category. In contrast to certain other legislations that may prioritise specific types of relationships, this particular policy provides safeguards to persons across all genders. By considering individuals of both genders, this perspective enables the safeguarding of all constituents within the academic community from instances of sexual harassment. In 2015, the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India introduced regulations specifically addressing the prevention, prohibition, and redressal of sexual harassment within higher educational institutions (Disha 2022, 43). These regulations were formulated to create a safer and more gender-sensitive academic environment for women employees and students. The guidelines outline the responsibilities of educational institutions in preventing and addressing

sexual harassment, establishing Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs), and ensuring a fair and confidential redressal process. By mandating the implementation of these regulations, the UGC aims to foster a culture of respect and gender equality within the academic sphere, recognizing the importance of creating harassment-free spaces for learning and professional development.

### **The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**

The recently passed *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023* stands as a significant legislative initiative in India, aiming to replace the archaic Indian Penal Code of 1860 (Vaibhav 2023, 2). Enacted during British colonial rule, the IPC has long been criticised for its outdated provisions and limitations in addressing contemporary legal challenges. The *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023* represents an attempt to modernise the legal framework, incorporating contemporary perspectives on crime and justice. Behind enactment of this statute, there is an intent to align the legal system with the evolving needs of society. The Act is expected to address not only substantive criminal law but also procedural aspects, with an emphasis on inclusivity, fairness, and efficiency. It is also expected that the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita* could potentially herald a new era in Indian jurisprudence, reflective of the values and complexities of the 21st century. During the formulation of the *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act*, lawmakers saw the importance of acknowledging the gender neutrality of sexual assault against minors. This recognition was also evident in the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance of 2013*, when deliberate efforts were made to ensure that sexual assault laws encompassed both genders. However, a careful reading of the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023* reveals that rape and other forms of sexual assault, including sexual harassment, are still classified as crimes that specifically target a certain gender.

### **III. International Approaches to Sexual Harassment at Workplace**

Indeed, the global perspective on sexual harassment has evolved, recognizing that males can be victims of such misconduct as well. Several jurisdictions around the world have taken steps to acknowledge and address male sexual harassment, aiming to create legal frameworks that are gender-inclusive and ensure the protection of all individuals in the workplace and beyond (Robert 1992, 535).

In countries like the United States, the legal approach to sexual harassment has been progressively inclusive. Chapter VII of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, has been interpreted to encompass protection against sexual harassment for both men and women. This has set a

precedent for other nations to consider a gender-neutral stance in their anti-sexual harassment laws. Similarly, in the European Union, directives and frameworks emphasize the prevention and combatting of sexual harassment in the workplace without specifying the gender of the victim (Beverley, A. Madek 1993, 43). European countries have implemented measures to ensure that their laws and policies are inclusive and considerate of the diverse ways in which individuals may experience sexual harassment.

Australia, too, has taken a comprehensive approach to address sexual harassment irrespective of gender. The Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 prohibits sexual harassment and extends protection to all individuals, emphasizing the importance of fostering workplaces that are free from such misconduct.

On the international stage, organisations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) have played a crucial role in shaping global standards. The ILO's Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, adopted in 2019, explicitly recognizes that both men and women can be victims of violence and harassment in the workplace (Makbule 2020, 289). It calls for member states to take measures to prevent and address such issues, emphasising the need for gender-inclusive policies.

Despite these positive steps, challenges persist in many parts of the world. Cultural norms, stereotypes, and societal expectations can contribute to the underreporting of male sexual harassment. Breaking down these barriers requires not only legal reforms but also a cultural shift that challenges preconceived notions about gender roles and victimisation.

International approaches to sexual harassment have increasingly embraced a gender-neutral perspective, acknowledging that males can be victims as well. Legal frameworks, guided by evolving social attitudes, are moving towards inclusivity, ensuring that the rights and protections against sexual harassment apply universally, regardless of gender. However, ongoing efforts are essential to bridge the gap between legal recognition and the lived experiences of individuals, fostering environments where everyone feels safe, respected, and free from harassment.

#### **IV. Penalising Sexual Harassment Faced by Males : The Way Ahead**

##### **The Need for a More Inclusive Approach**

Eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace requires a culture that welcomes people of all gender identities and expressions. This can be accomplished if businesses make it a top priority to foster an environment where everyone feels valued and respected at work. Implementing policies and training programmes that go above and beyond compliance with legal requirements is one way to achieve this goal.

The importance of a strategy that takes into account both sexes in combating sexual harassment has also been highlighted by studies. The aforementioned approach acknowledges the unique experiences of persons across various genders and attempts to effectively handle the underlying reasons contributing to incidents of harassment. The review suggests that in order to develop a workplace that is safe and equitable for all workers, it is necessary to conduct intensive training programmes, establish secure reporting mechanisms, and adopt an intersectional approach to addressing incidents of sexual harassment.

#### Awareness and Sensitization

Although men are less frequently targeted for sexual harassment compared to women, the occurrence of sexual assault on men remains a significant issue (Paula, et al. 2018, 7). The phenomenon of sexual harassment against males is frequently overlooked, resulting in male victims being dissuaded from reporting their experiences due to apprehensions about being stigmatised as feeble or effeminate upon disclosure. Rather than subjecting men who have experienced sexual harassment to humiliation, it is imperative for society to attentively heed the narratives of male victims, demonstrate empathy and compassion towards them, and acknowledge the validity of their traumatic experiences. Education and awareness campaigns have been identified as the most efficacious approach to effect societal change without resorting to direct confrontation. By participating in these activities, individuals can contribute to the transformation of gender perspectives and the dismantling of stereotypical images between men and women.

#### Challenging Stereotypes

Rapid progress in the fields of science, technology, entrepreneurship, and increased social awareness have characterised the first decade of the 21st century where the issue of gender inequality is one of the most discussed and debated social problems today. Every member of society feels the effects of gender inequality, both directly and indirectly, to varied degrees which manifests in various ways and has far-reaching effects. Such inequality permits the disproportionate and unjust privilege of one gender over the other in terms of resources, opportunities, exposure, power, and representation. From a young age, males are taught to 'be a man' and provide for their families by pursuing masculine ideals such as violence, power, and control. Men are socialised to feel they must conceal their vulnerabilities and in the same notion are also taught to look past any sexual injustice occurring against them.



### Organisational Approach

Organisations have the ability to commence the neutrality process by using a gender-neutral approach in the development of their sexual harassment prevention policy. In this approach, persons who experience incidents of sexual harassment inside the professional environment will be able to commence the procedure of filing a formal complaint. Although the *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013* currently lacks gender-neutrality in its inherent structure, it does not place any limitations on companies seeking to implement a gender-neutral policy in compliance with the Act. Such organisations that will adopt a gender-neutral sexual harassment prevention policy possess the capacity to effectively handle and resolve complaints filed by employees of diverse genders without waiting for the legislature to enact a gender-neutral law dealing with sexual harassment.

## V. Conclusion

The investigation into the marginalisation of male victims of sexual assault in the workplace underscores the urgent need to reassess and rethink the conversation surrounding sexual harassment. The plight of male victims of sexual harassment in India indicates a notable disparity in terms of awareness, support, and reporting, owing to the fact that prevailing legal frameworks aimed at addressing such misconduct do not prioritise the use of gender-neutral terminology. In the pursuit of establishing inclusive work environments devoid of discrimination and harassment, it is imperative for legislation to acknowledge and confront the gender-specific oversights that inadvertently perpetuate the ongoing marginalisation of male individuals who have experienced sexual assault and harassment. If the country enhances its understanding of sexual assault and improves its legal frameworks to handle gender-specific challenges, it may effectively strive to create inclusive working environments that promote equality, dignity, and respect for individuals of all genders. This can be achieved through the cultivation of a more comprehensive definition of sexual abuse and the refinement of legal frameworks to effectively address the distinct issues encountered by individuals of all genders. It is thus imperative that a persuasive social appeal, urging governments, organisations, and society at large is brought to adopt an inclusive approach in addressing sexual harassment and safeguarding the welfare of all employees, irrespective of their gender.

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## **Digital Wounds: Understanding the Psychological Impact of Online Scams**

Shivani Amoli and Monika Gupta

### **Abstract**

*The development of a contemporary society and the emergence of the Internet and digital media have altered how we view and engage with reality, blurring the lines between the virtual and the real and altering our preconceived notions of authenticity and truth. As the digital landscape expands, so does the prevalence of online scams, affecting millions worldwide. This paper aims to shed light on the psychological toll inflicted upon scam victims, transcending the immediate financial loss. It investigates the multifaceted psychological consequences of cyber-victimization, drawing insight from the web series “Wedding.con”. Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulation offers a theoretical framework for understanding the hyperreality of the digital realm, where representations and simulations blur the line between the real and the simulated. In the context of online scams, this theory elucidates how the scammers create simulated realities to deceive and exploit victims, manipulating perceptions and distorting truths. By connecting technology, media, and psychology, this multidisciplinary approach improves empathy, raises awareness, and helps create a safer online environment while reducing the widespread consequences of online deceit and exploitation.*

**Keywords:** Digital frauds, Cybercrime, Wedding.con, Matrimonial Fraud, Simulation, Hyperreal, Digital Society

The Internet does more than only connect people worldwide; it also creates a virtual world where we live. The Internet offers boundless opportunities for exploring the world through virtual travel, global connectivity, and access to diverse cultures and perspectives. Jean Baudrillard sees the world as entering an orbital era: **‘the perpetual tourism of people who no longer undertake voyages in the true sense, but simply go round within their circumscribed territory (Baudrillard 1990, 29).’** Prior to the development of electronic technology, physical proximity was a major barrier to human communication. It required people to be together in order for ideas, facts, or feelings to be shared. But as electronic technology has advanced—especially the internet—communication has become more fluid across geographical boundaries. We may now communicate with people instantly, no matter where they are in

the world. Our capacity to interact and communicate outside of the limitations of our physical bodies has been effectively expanded.

In this digital landscape, the separation of consciousness from the physical body becomes more pronounced. When we engage with electronic devices, whether it's through social media, online gaming, or virtual reality, our consciousness inhabits these digital realms, detached from our physical surroundings. The experience of interacting with others and consuming information becomes mediated by technology, blurring the boundaries between the physical and virtual worlds. However, it's essential to recognize that while technology facilitates this extension of the self, it also shapes and influences our perceptions and behaviours. The design of digital platforms, algorithms, and interfaces can significantly impact how we interact with information and each other. As such, while electronic technology offers new possibilities for communication and connection, it also raises questions about privacy, identity, and the nature of human consciousness in the digital age.

In the digital world, where connectivity and convenience reign, the prevalence of digital frauds serves as a stark reminder of the importance of cybersecurity. **Scams are growing more commonplace due to the Internet's ability to provide anonymous, affordable global delivery, but they are also challenging to prosecute (Smith 2010). There are many other types of scams that exist today, including phone scams, phishing emails, financial and investment scams, clairvoyant readings, miracle cures, lotteries, and phony competitions and auctions (Lea, Fischer & Evans 2009). In addition, there are romance scams, which are distinct from other types of scams due to the time and effort the con artist puts into getting the victim ready. Because of trust and emotional investment, victims of romance fraud may lose a significant amount of money (Whitty & Buchanan 2012, 5).** A worrying example of digital fraud in the present era is matrimonial scams that target women. In this increasingly digitalized world, women are subjected to a myriad of online threats and abuses. Preying on people's emotions and need for companionship, scammers use matrimonial and dating platforms to trick people by taking advantage of the trust and vulnerability that constitute relationships. Since women are frequently disproportionately the targets of and affected by identity theft and online scams, the gendered nature of these crimes cannot be disregarded.

## **Baudrillard's Simulation and Hyperreal**

Simulacra and the hyperreal, concepts developed by Jean Baudrillard, provide a thought-provoking analysis of modern life, especially in light of capitalism and technology. Simulacra, in Baudrillard's view, are representations that have no connection to reality at all and are duplicates of an original. According to this paradigm, he contends that the present era sees a growing blurring of the lines between simulation and reality, which gives rise to what he called the "hyperreal." From a Baudrillardian perspective, the way in which the Internet is portrayed as a type of cybernetic landscape serves to diminish the symbolic line that divides the literal from the symbolic. By presenting increasingly lifelike simulations of a huge and reachable universe, it abandons "the real" in favor of "the hyperreal" (Nunes 1995, 314). This theory of Simulation illustrates how scammers fabricate virtual worlds to trick and take advantage of victims, warping reality and perverting perceptions in the process.

### **Hyperreal and Digital Frauds**

The hyperreal is best exemplified by digital frauds, as cybercriminals create complex plans to take advantage of the uncertainty of the virtual world. The privacy of a person's identity in digital communication 'allows people to develop reputations based on the quality of their ideas, rather than job, wealth, age or status (Donath, 1999, 54).' The growth of the Internet and electronic media and its part in the creation of a new global society which has transformed the way we perceive and interact with reality blurring the boundaries between the virtual and the physical, and challenging traditional notion of truth and authenticity. Modern capitalist societies are increasingly shaped by simulation, which has a widespread influence on political speech, cultural norms, individual subjectivities, and economic transactions. The hyperreal is a new kind of reality in which representations and simulations supersede the real world, concealing the lines between authenticity and artifice and fact and fiction.

McLuhan's viewpoint, which regards media as an extension of human senses and capacities, provides an intriguing perspective through which to examine our connection with technology. Essentially, McLuhan maintained that any medium we produce—be it a technological instrument, a tool, or a means of communication—extends a part of who we are into the outside world. Thus, we can see how electronic technology expands and reshapes our views and capacities when we think about it, particularly when we consider the Internet and World Wide Web. The issues of appearance, representation, and counterfeiting take centre stage in digital frauds. According to Baudrillard, it is harder to distinguish between the real and the fake in modern capitalist society. Advertisements, media images, and consumer goods are examples of simulated realities that have detached themselves from any objective reality to take on a life of their own.

The hyperreal, as defined by Baudrillard, is made up of these representations that surpass reality itself in reality.

Baudrillard links the concerns of representation, appearance, and counterfeiting to the simulacra and industrial technology hierarchies. Accordingly, it may be argued that simulation encompasses a whole economic, political, ideological, and cultural process in modern capitalist societies, transforming the fictitious and fake into a new reality that is hyperreal—more real than the real (Baudrillard 1983). Industrial technology produces images and media in large quantities, which results in a world overflowing with representations. However, there is frequently no direct referent to reality in these representations. Rather, they turn self-referential, moving through a restricted set of symbols and signals.

### **Wedding.con**

Wedding.con is a true-crime documentary series on Prime Video India, directed by Tanuja Chandra and produced by BBC Studios India. It was released on December 29, 2023, based on the real-life personal experience of five women who seek to fulfil a universal dream- Marriage (Chandra 2023). While talking about the documentary, Tanuja Chandra said in an interview with *Hindustan Times*, 'It's not an observational documentary. Half of it is recreated. Interviews are inherently static. But the women knew that not an iota of me was judging them. So, it was very heart-to-heart.' However, in their search for the perfect life-partner, they had been scammed out of money by men on different matchmaking websites. They get exploited by the scammers, both financially and psychologically, who were posing as suitable suitors online. Tanuja Chandra, the director not only opens up about the less discussed problem in today's world but also shows us the problem as it is. In this document series, each woman narrates her story and recalls how they met their partners or the person they get scammed by and were tempted for a beautiful future. Tragically, their lives were turned upside down by these scam artists, leaving them with broken hearts and crushed hopes. While interviewing the victims, one can see the true and raw emotions of these women and the impact they had after the incidents. 'Honestly, real women talking about their very real experiences will always be very different from someone researching and writing fiction', said Tanuja. The pain, suffering, trauma and humiliation that these women suffered after their trust was crushed paint a vivid picture of the profound emotional toll of betrayal.

Marriage has traditionally been seen as a significant event, viewed as a milestone in communities all across the world, especially for women. Though views on marriage have changed overtime,

women are still under pressure to be married, and this pressure frequently has a big impact on their lives and choices. Cultural norms and tradition, where marriage is frequently associated with stability, security, and fulfilment, firmly establish this pressure. Due to the pressure placed on women to get married, many of them make quick judgments and turn to matrimonial services, which may be fraudulent. 'Matrimonial frauds have huge emotional costs because when we decide we are going to marry, we are making decisions for our bodies, our identities, and our happiness. And as we start to invest in it, we are opening up the most intimate and interior secret parts of us. And that's why the con operates at the deepest, most personal level' (Dr Chitra Raghavan). As Marshal McLuhan, wrote in 1967, the digital media is 'so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered.'

### **Romance Scam**

The internet has made possible for the world to have endless communication and people have all the accessibility to connect to people. In her 'Scammers Persuasive Techniques Model', Monica T Whitty describes how a scammer builds trust and take advantage of a victim. Before the perpetrator even makes a money request, they put the victim through several phases (Whitty 2013). Early on in the scam, the con artist professes their affection for the victim and asks for their relationship to transition from the dating site to email and instant messaging, declaring they want to be in an exclusive relationship. At this point, the scammer begins to prepare the victim by establishing a deep, personal contact with them in particular through online media.

Scammers engage their victims in the pretence of marriage by manipulating their emotions and cognitive processes, which results in financial loss combined with permanent psychological and emotional distress (Whitty and Buchanan 2015). Women's vulnerabilities may be exacerbated by gender stereotypes and cultural expectations, leaving them more open to manipulation and exploitation in digital settings. The psychological effects of digital frauds can be further exacerbated by the junction of gender, age, race, and socioeconomic position, which further exacerbates already-existing inequities and gaps in access to resources and help.

### **Cultural Conformity**

In India, marriage holds great cultural significance, which makes it easy to take advantage of. The con artist will attempt to ascertain what kind of marriage-related culture a nation supports. Con artists



frequently take advantage of local customs and beliefs, especially in nations like India where marriage is regarded as an important event in life. In India, getting married is a cultural need. According to Baudrillard, simulation replaces representation at the point where the real becomes hyperreal. It may be argued that we are on the verge of such a time, characterized chiefly by the advent of a virtual environment. The internet has evolved into an independent realm with opportunities and a space for sharing cultural ideals. In an interview with *Hindustan Times*, Tanuja Chandra says, 'Are you married is the only question people are asked. Because that's assumed to be the completion of your life. I hate for young people to be constantly cautious and suspicious. Where's the fun in being weighed down by anxiety? We need to look at this docuseries through the lens that there's a cultural need that's being exploited by greedy and dishonest perpetrators.' These scammers create engrossing tales that speak to cultural expectations and goals, capitalizing on people's need for security, affection, and social acceptability. Narratives used by scammers are tailored to exploit the vulnerabilities they identify. Scammers are becoming more adept at identifying the fears of women. Chitra Raghavan, the psychologist in the documentary says, 'It's not that women are being scammed because they're stupid. They get scammed because they've money. And they have jobs, the education and potential to get loans. Scammers are getting better at figuring out what educated women are afraid of. What kind of societal pressure are on them. What are their vulnerabilities?' We are often quick to judge women, and especially more so after they have suffered harm. It is basically the response of deeply ingrained, internalized misogyny. 'The world is very quick to judge. Even though we all desire love in our lives and we'd want a beautiful partnership where we can share our thoughts, fears, and ambitions with somebody. It's one of the beautiful things in life, right? So, we all have these longings. I, for not even one second, thought, 'How could she do this.' I never needed to wrap my head around it. It's such a human instinct to want this', said Tanuja Chandra in an interview with *Hindustan Times*. The stigma associated with failed marriages and the fear of societal judgment can deter victims from reporting scams or seeking assistance, exacerbating the psychological and financial consequences of deception.

### **Identity Theft**

The digital world is full of impersonations that make it difficult to tell which online interactions are real, from phishing scams that pose as trustworthy emails to false identities used in financial crime. We remake ourselves as online personas, giving ourselves new identities, occupations, residences, and relationships. Virtual environments have been referred to as 'laboratories for constructing identities', offering a venue and a chance for secondary self-identification inquiries. (Turkle 2014, 184). Identity is

become increasingly varied, and there are no boundaries in virtual environments. However, it has drawbacks of its own. Fraudsters can now prey on women online, with some even going so far as to intrude on children. The internet's constant development is making it more difficult to govern and identify, which is fuelling the growth of cybercriminals. Instead of serving as a mirror reflecting truth and falsehoods, the mediatized hyperreal world, made up of digital screens and simulacra, is a transparent, depthless void that devours every negativity and singularity (Baudrillard 1993, 111–174). Due to technological advancements, cybercriminals can now operate from anywhere in the globe and perpetrate crimes using fictitious identities. This indicates that they are largely getting away with it without being punished and have no physical interaction with the outside world.

It is easy to pretend to be an ideal person by presenting false attributes and qualities on online platforms. In cyberspace, a person develops their own unique network personality. The virtual personality of a person might differ significantly from their "real personality," which they typically exhibit. Sherry Turkle, an American sociologist, demonstrates how the ability to forge one's own identity on social media—for example, by creating their desired persona—plays a significant role in the lives of young people and transforms interpersonal connections. She argues that in the digital age, self-presentation is always mediated by the social media. Scammers now have greater control over how they show themselves, giving them the ability to plan their identity management or self-disclosure, guaranteeing the best possible self-image with the least amount of awkward social interaction (Ellison et al., 2006). Cyberspace allows the person to create and present her or his identity differently than in reality. Digital technologies have a huge impact on the most intimate things that a person can have: their own persons, their own selves. Through online personas, social media profiles, and digital interactions, our digital presence grows to become an extension of who we are. Our identities, personalities, and even emotions are frequently reflected in these digital representations. We may interact with others, traverse virtual environments, and express ourselves in previously unthinkable ways.

### **Information Manipulation**

In today's modern digitalized world, sharing everything about oneself has become a standard and this openness had becoming more and more regular, universal, and desirable. Chaos and complexity are created by the multitude of viewpoints and information that are accessible through global media outlets. Different voices can be heard and new stories can arise because of this plurality. Conversely, it may also result in divisiveness, disinformation, and uncertainty. In the digital realm, identities, interactions, and

information exist as spectral representations, appearing and disappearing with a click of a button. This spectral quality challenges traditional notions of presence and authenticity, as digital interactions often lack the physicality and immediacy of face-to-face communication. Victims build a trustworthy relationship with the offender by self-disclosing personal information about themselves. This relationship seems so intense and real, they find it easy to self-disclose their inner most thoughts and feelings.

The coherent vision of modernity is undermined by the spread of communication and information through international media platforms and networks. "The real" is transformed into a chaotic, liquid spectrality through digital plurality (Bauman 2000). The reality is no longer fixed but fluid and subject to change and it could have so many reinterpretations and negotiation on digital realm. With the development of the internet and digital technology, there has been a rapid increase in the volume and accessibility of information. These social media platforms have enabled the instantaneous communication and dissemination of information on a global scale. The digital society is defined by a move toward a more democratic setting where people share their content at various stages.

### **Digital Friendship**

When technology meets human vulnerabilities, it becomes enticing. Digital connections could provide the sense of companionship without the obligations of friendship. Even though we are connected, our digitized space enables us to remain hidden from one another. Suddenly, though, we can feel completely alone in the dim light of the virtual society. Even after connecting for hours, people occasionally don't feel like they've communicated. One of the way scammers succeed is by overwhelming the victim, using the emotional vulnerabilities. Women sometimes believe these people in certain situation and circumstances. In most cases, these scammers target a vulnerable individual, especially widow and divorced women because they may be more emotionally susceptible and seeking companionship. It has been discovered that people who are easily frightened, responsive to flattery or sweet talk, have tendency to take high risk, or who lack self-control are more likely to fall victim to fraud. Online scammers take advantage of trust, manipulate cognitive biases, and prey on human weaknesses. Victims, often suspecting, are frequently drawn into complex scams that cause them emotional anguish, identity theft, and financial loss. Victims deal with feelings of shame and guilt, which increases their mental anguish.

## **Psychological Impact**

The majority of the time, women think that the crime was their own fault. While explaining how the legal system is biased against a woman, especially if the victim is a working woman. Tanuja says, 'When she seeks justice, she's already gone through the agony of calling herself foolish. Then comes the family who calls her foolish, then the police, and then the law. The onus of defending herself is entirely on the victim. No blame on the perpetrator!'. There aren't many women who come forward to allege marriage fraud because of the fear that it will bring disgrace to their families. Women have the feelings of resentment and anger against the culprit even when the financial impact may not be significant because one is emotionally invested in a relationship, and they feel a sense of betrayal, hurt and disappointment.

Women experienced internalized negative emotions, including feelings of humiliation and shame, which restrain them from sharing their experiences with others and it also refrain them from reporting about the crime to police. Moreover, several women expressed self-criticism, considering themselves as gullible, greedy and inattentive. Women experience a loss of prestige, incredulity, and self-doubt. They also suffer from a decline in confidence and trust, as well as a loss of self-worth (Whitty & Buchannan). The victims of fraud believed that their experience altered them negatively both on a personal and social level. Women lost their interest in socializing with people, finding it challenging to trust others enough to engage in relationship.

## **Conclusion**

After falling victim to a digital scam, women experience a severe and complex psychological fallout that reflects the intersection of online vulnerabilities, gender relations, and the widespread nature of digital deceit. Women who fall victim to digital frauds frequently experience emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal difficulties that can have a long-term impact on their general well-being and sense of security online. It is impossible to emphasize the emotional toll that digital frauds have on women. As their sense of autonomy is compromised and their trust is broken, victims may feel vulnerable, ashamed, and betrayed. One's perception of vulnerability in online contacts can be increased by experiencing strong emotions of dread, anxiety, and helplessness in response to the breach of personal boundaries and the loss of financial assets. Furthermore, the psychological effects of digital scams on women are not limited to personal encounters but rather encompass wider social and relational dynamics. After being tricked or tricked online, women who have been victimized may experience social stigma, feelings of loneliness, and other negative

emotions. The stress of managing intricate legal and financial procedures can further intensify emotions of overwhelm and stress, which adds to the psychological toll that digital scams take.

Given these difficulties, it is imperative to address the psychological effects of digital frauds on women using a gender-sensitive strategy. This entails acknowledging the particular risks and challenges that women face in digital environments, offering specialized resources and support services, and advocating for digital literacy and empowerment programs that provide women the tools they need to stay safe online. Furthermore, by giving women the community, validation, and understanding they require to move past their traumas and heal, a culture of empathy, solidarity, and support might lessen the psychological toll that digital scams have on victims. To guard against the constantly changing threats posed by cybercriminals, it is imperative to remain vigilant, employing robust security measures and exercising caution to protect against the ever- evolving threats posed by cybercriminals.

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## Indian Public Education as a 'Field': Re-examining Bourdieu

Shubhashish Trivedi

### Abstract

*Pierre Bourdieu defines 'field' as a historical, Non-Homogeneous, Spatial-social setting in which agents and their social position is located. Bourdieu accounts for socially differentiated educational attainment. Bourdieu analyses Education as a field and puts forth the theorisation of differences and inequalities within this field. This paper aims to look at the structure of 'School' as a field in the Indian context, probing into the agency-structure debate to study the extent of choice, freedom and agency that students and teachers in India have or do not have in the public schools. The theorisation of 'field' is intricately connected with Habitus, Capital and Practice. The text attempts to describe the public schooling system in India as a field and highlights the features, challenges and opportunities of the same.*

Keywords: Education, Field, Habitus, Bourdieu, Indian Public Education.

### Introduction

Equity is the idea that everyone in a community has equal access to opportunities and outcomes. It includes equal rights and opportunities for development, equal access to social goods and services and the unhindered ability to engage in the political processes, equitable educational and economic opportunities. Equity is the state of being fair and just. It is about ensuring everyone has the same opportunities to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. Equity is often contrasted with equality, which means giving everyone the same thing. However, equity recognises that we do not all start from the same place, and that some people may need additional support to achieve success. Equity is a means to achieve Equality. Equality is a fundamental human right.

It is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights- 1948, which states that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Equality is also essential for a just and equitable society. It allows everyone to reach their full potential and to contribute to society in meaningful ways. Agency is the capacity to act or choose to act. It is the ability to make decisions and take actions that affect our own lives and the world around us. Agency is often contrasted with determinism, the belief that all events are predetermined and that we have no free will. Agency is a complex concept with certain common themes.

One key theme is that agency is the ability to understand our options and to make choices that are consistent with our values and goals. Another key theme is that agency is not something that we possess in a vacuum. It is shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which we live. For example, our access to education, employment, and other resources can limit or expand our range of choices.

Equity, Equality and Agency of the student are some areas of contest in the public schooling system in India. This paper can be distributed in four broad sections. Firstly, this paper explores various issues in the Indian Public schooling system pertaining to various morphological aspects present in Indian society. There is no contestation that there are inequalities in the public schooling system in India. However, at the level of an idea, the inception of public or government-run schools was a step to mitigate the caste, class, gender and other existing differences in the field of education as well as the society and establish equality (Naik 1963, 10-11). There also exists a consensus that education is a fundamental necessity and is a precursor to all other aspects of human development. This paper tries to draw a parallel between the ideas, concepts and theories given by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), a French Sociologist with wide ranging studies on various topics like- Education, Culture, art, Politics, Law, and Literature etc., and the Indian public schooling System.

The next part of my analysis will focus on Bourdieu's concepts of Habitus, Field, and Capital. There is an understanding that Habitus, Field, Practice and Capital cannot be fully understood if studied separately and in isolation. Thus, keeping in mind the relationship among these concepts, the paper tries to provide a more critical and robust understanding of their work in the public schooling system in India and how they manifest in this educational space in both overt and covert ways. For the third theme of this paper, the paper tries to situate the functioning of the schooling system in India with reference to the agency of students and teachers in the system and the structure



of public schooling in the broader framework of the Structure-Agency debate. This paper tries to analyse public education in India as a field and highlight important features of the same. After understanding the system as a field, the text attempts to highlight the questions of structure and agency in the field and their manifestation. For the final theme of the paper provides insights into the effect that public education and schooling system in India has on the morphology of the Indian society.

### **Public Education in India as a 'Field'**

The nature of public education in India is multifaceted. The most important aspect of public schooling is that education in India is free and compulsory for children from ages six to fourteen. Government-run schools serve an important function in achieving this goal, and such public schools have high enrolment rates due to availability and accessibility. Education is a subject under the concurrent list in the Indian constitution, which means that both the central and state governments have the responsibility to manage it.

The public schools have students from all socio-economic backgrounds, and thus, it is a true reflection of the diverse Indian society. Thus, it serves as an essential tool for achieving upward social mobility and addressing the difficult questions existing in society. By providing equitable resources and opportunities, it addresses the historical injustices done to a vast majority of the Indian society on the basis of their caste, class, gender, ethnic and racial backgrounds, etc. 'Despite the wide framework of private schooling, it fails to alarm itself with the concerns of social justice' (Brighouse 2004, 617-618).

Public schooling system in India focuses on making a civic citizen and inculcate the sensibilities required for individuals to excel in their private as well as social life. Families who are not able to afford education because of the lack of economic capital have public schooling system as the only option for increasing their status in the society. While status is an important determinant of educational attainment and outcomes, is the socio-economic status of the student the only and the

most important component? To find an answer to this, we must first study the role of structure and agency in educational institutions.

Critical to the study of Indian public education as a field, is the importance of structure and agency of the individual. 'Structure' refers to the external factors that give shape to the system of public education in India; some such factors are- government control over the educational institutions, government funding and infrastructure, etc. Agency not just about freedom from constraint, but also about freedom to act in accordance with our own will, here agency means the opportunity to make decisions, perform tasks and act as per one's own will. Structuralists argue that the structures determine the educational outcomes. Thus, quality, access and outcomes of public education in India are determined by the attitude of the Indian government regarding education. They believe that the government does not provide proper funding to public institutions for education and thus the lower percentage of GDP that is spent on education. Public expenditure on education in India is around 4 per cent of GDP. However, analysis shows that only per cent is borne by the Union while per cent is borne by the states together.

‘The long pending goal of spending per cent of GDP on education needs to be equally shared by both lest the development of education remain a lofty ideal’ (Motkuri and Revathi 2023, 194). The sorry state of publicly funded primary education in India is well documented and provides favourable conditions for the rapid expansion of private schools. ‘The PROBE report found that unlike government primary schools, many of which are dysfunctional, private schools provided active teaching: when investigators visited these schools, teachers were almost always in class and teaching. In India, school quality matters to children’ schooling participation, decisions and to their learning, both of which are considerably low’ (Kingdon 2005, 20-26).

On the other end of this debate are scholars who argue that individuals have the ability to overcome structural constraints. Mitnick introduced the insight that institutions form around agency, and evolve to deal with agency, in response to the essential imperfection of agency relationships: ‘Behaviour never occurs as the principal prefers it because it does not pay to make it perfect. But society creates institutions that attend to these imperfections, managing or buffering them, adapting to them, or becoming chronically distorted by them. Thus, to fully understand the agency, we need both streams to see the incentives as well as the institutional structures’ (Mitnick 2006,

2). The public education system in India tries to maintain a balance between both these perspectives.

The issue of agency is not just limited to the students but also extends to the teachers. Many scholars have put forward the perspective that the schoolteacher in Indian public schools is a mere passive agent with no control over the what, when and how, aspects of the teaching-learning process. While it is true that the schooling system has come a long way from being completely teacher-centric, as in the *guru-shishya* tradition, to being student-centric, 'the average schoolteacher does not seem to have any control over their own teaching process at all; the schoolteacher, as a former centrepiece of processes of social change, is reduced to a mere object of educational reform or worse a passive agent of the prevailing ideology of the modern state' (Batra 2005, 4347).

Only the public schooling system in India addresses the question of student agency and provides them with the same. Through cultivating sensitivities and sensibilities via the curriculum and activities, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. Students are encouraged to take up leadership roles and voluntarily flag and resolve issues pertaining to student welfare. Through the 'No Detention Policy' in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the public Schooling framework aims that the learning should be addressed and evaluated using the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)' method where no students can fail or be expelled from the school until the complete primary school. This allows the students to learn at their own pace, resulting in better educational development.

Through the aforementioned arguments, it becomes clear that the public schooling system in India values and promotes student agency. Bourdieu's unparalleled contribution to solving, or dealing with, the perennial paradox of agency versus social determinism, is possibly more relevant now than it was during the years in which it was argued, yet to make use of it requires a thorough examination of his key concepts – Habitus, field, and symbolic capital (Joseph 2020, 108).

## Habitus: Inside the Field of Public Education

Sociologically, Habitus often manifests itself in individual choices or 'freedom'. This means that Habitus can be understood as a 'generating factor' or 'predetermined dispositions'. Habitus can be defined as 'the property of all social agents comprising of both, the structured and structuring structure' (Maton 2014, 49).

The Habitus of individuals belonging to different cultural, social, economic and political backgrounds is different. For Bourdieu, it was not enough that these practices and phenomena just be accepted as they seem and are told. He developed a deeper, more robust and critical understanding of the structures and tried to look 'beyond the structure' for complete understanding of any phenomena; here he differs from the Positivist school of thought as he believes in much more than just empirical observation of phenomena. This can be understood as- The Positivist tradition was too static for Bourdieu: 'Structured structures taken as synchronic forms, and often based on primitive societies. While the Critical tradition reifies ideology- as a 'structuring structure'- in imposing the ideology of the dominant class in the critical tradition or, maintaining social control in the positivist one. Bourdieu felt strongly that 'the social function of French education system, as envisaged by the innovators of The Third Republic at the end of the nineteenth century, had now become a mechanism of social division rather than solidarity. He wanted school learning to be an instrument for social integration' (Robbins 2014, 32).

Moving ahead with the understanding of Habitus, this paper will now examine how Habitus manifests itself in practice inside the schooling system. According to Barnes and Todd (2021), 'learning cannot be reduced to monologist rote memorisation'. The interaction between the student and the teacher is essential for this process to take place. This process creates a meaningful context for the student where they further build on their already acquired repertoire of knowledge. A teacher's role is significant in the same as a facilitator and a social interactive partner. Social agents play a crucial role in the construction of meaningful tools of thinking that are necessary for learning are made available by the social and cultural agents who, in educational spaces are the teachers.

We have understood that the interactions taking place in the classrooms and school are crucial for not just an increased framework of knowledge of students but also for their holistic development. It must be highlighted that understanding the content in the learning method is important, but the pedagogy used is crucial as well in shaping civic citizens and civil society. Through the understanding developed by Bourdieu's concept of Habitus, this paper argues that the relations and interactions between students and teachers are also guided and formed by certain 'habitus'. 'Interactions between teachers and learners inside the classroom and school systems impacts the engagement of learners and have been shown to facilitate and reproduce cultural hegemony rather than challenge the patterns of interaction between dominant and subordinate communities in the wider society' (Cummins 2009, 263-270). It is argued that educational spaces often maintain certain forms of hierarchical cultural patterns to reproduce an unequal civil society. 'The history and contemporary nature of Indian civil society, ridden with relations of caste and class, often interpellates its agenda of hierarchical order in the cultures of schooling. Children from marginalised communities, particularly from the *Adivasi* (tribal) cultures, are more vulnerable to these undercurrents. The content and nature of the curriculum and modes of pedagogical interactions are the focal channels of its operationalisation' (Manojan 2019, 101).

Public schooling in India is under the control of the government and education is a fundamental right under article 21-A (Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009) in the Indian constitution. The accessibility of public schools turns them into a site of social and cultural reproduction. It is here that the paper argues that the Habitus in the Public Schools in India becomes a barrier in the way of development indicators being optimal. While plethora of challenges encompass the field of public education in India, it has a number of positive effects on the morphology of Indian society. This paper highlights in detail how the system of public education benefits various aspects of society.

### Effects of Education on Aspects of Indian Society

The term 'Morphology' is defined in Biology as the study of shapes, structure and composition of organisms. For the study of individuals and society, 'Social Morphology' was coined by Emile Durkheim in 1899 in his work- 'The Rules of Sociological Method'. It is of no further contestation that education as a field facilitates and reproduces the powerful and dominant culture and Habitus

which maintains and reproduces the existing inequalities in the Indian society. In a different vein, there are several positive effects that education has had and continues to have in the Indian society.

The caste hierarchy in India operates at all social levels, its effect can be seen in the inequalities related to opportunities and various socio-economic development indicators. As mentioned above, cultural capital arising out of the dominance of a particular caste will advantage the holders of this capital disproportionately. Education can result in an increased awareness and critical thinking among the citizens which can prove to be an effective tool for challenging the caste structure in the society.

Class is also an important aspect that is affected by education. Education has had a significant number of positive effects on the class structure in India, which has been possible majorly through the public schooling system. Central to the understanding of Habitus is Bourdieu's conception of a 'social class'. Bourdieu's conception of a social class differs from Karl Marx's idea of a social class, not fundamentally but in understanding. For Bourdieu, individuals belonging to the same position in the society are still just 'Individuals'. Bourdieu believes that, for any group of number of individuals to exist as a class, they must share the acts and Habitus to take a form of a social class. 'The starting point for Bourdieu's approach to class is the claim that all agents within a particular society have an objective position in *Social Space* in virtue of their portfolio of economic and cultural capital' (Crossley 2014, 86).

Power and dominance are the products of not only material resources but also the possession of cultural and social resources. Moreover, through the concept of symbolic capital he is drawing attention to the fact that the value of any form of capital depends, in part, upon its social recognition. Education as a symbolic capital works together with other capitals to advantage and disadvantage and to position social agents in multiple fields. Education provides a way for people from the margins to merge with mainstream society, the rise of middle class in India is an excellent example of how education helps mitigate class differences. By gaining education, individuals also gain agency to make decisions regarding their future course of action.

During the British Raj, a number of educational institutions were opened for the sole reason that the Raj required well-educated native administrators. This gave rise to a new class, namely the 'middle class' between the rich officials and traders and the working classes. It was this middle

class that played an active role in taking over the institutions of governance from the British and proactively participated in the freedom struggle.

In addition to contributions in the caste and class aspect, education has profound effects on the tribal population in India. According to the Census of India 2011, India has a tribal population of more than 10.2 crores; India has the single largest tribal population in the world. This constitutes 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country (*Indian Tribes and Education, 2020*). Education has Social, economic and Cultural benefits for the tribal population. Scheduled Tribes are defined and incorporated under article 342 of the Indian constitution:

*‘342(1) Scheduled Tribes --- the President may with respect to any State or Union Territory, and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by a public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within tribes or tribal communities as Scheduled Tribe in relation to that State or Union Territory as the case may be’.*

*(2) ‘Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification’ (National Commission for Schedule Tribes, 2016).*

Education has had many positive effects on the status of the tribal population in India, including better awareness and demands of their rights and duties. The tribal population, have not always had the opportunity to access education. The growing population of the scheduled tribes possessing elementary level of education is a marker that education has also played a vital role in better understanding of their challenges and can play a key role in potentially solving the same. The primary motivation for tribal population to attain education is not the same as other upper classes. Their motivation is to economically secure the families.

## **Conclusion**

The public education system in India has been analysed thoroughly and critically in this paper. This paper can broadly be distributed in four major themes- Analysing public education in India as a field and its morphology, the manifestation of Habitus in the field, the nature of Indian public schooling system and the benefits of Indian public schooling system on various aspects of the Indian society. This paper very critically explains the challenges as well as the opportunities in the field of public schooling in India. To build an understanding of the field and for its study, this paper rests fundamentally upon Pierre Bourdieu and his theorisation of Field, Habitus, and Capital. Although Bourdieu uses these concepts with reference to the French education system, this paper attempts to situate these concepts in the field of public schooling and public education in India.

The public schooling system in India can be analysed and seen to have a plethora of challenges as well as opportunities. These factors affect the composition, status and functioning of the Indian society. This paper dwells upon the component of education in the public schooling and education system and provides major insights in the same. The text provides a holistic view of the field of public schooling in India with its focus on major concepts like the Structure-Agency debate, Habitus and education as a symbolic capital. The paper argues that the Indian public schooling system tries to maintain a balance between both the structures of education as well as individual agency. For a better understanding of the structure-agency debate, the morphology of the Indian society has been studied in this paper. In the light of this paper, it may be argued that the Indian Public Schooling system has various shortcomings at the level of idea and practice both. Examining the field of Indian public education through the lens of Pierre Bourdieus' concepts of Field, Capital and Habitus and tries to assess the structure of public schooling and the agency of the social agents located in this field i.e. students and teachers. This paper analyses the intricacies of the field of Indian public schooling system.



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## Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project and Environmental Sustainability

### - A Critical Analysis

Siddhartha Protim Dutta

Himashri Mudoi

#### Abstract

*Development and environmental sustainability should go hand in hand. Development is one of the utmost desires for humankind, but humans and the whole animal and plant kingdom depend on Mother Nature. When organising developmental activities, protecting the nature should be a top priority for humans. However in most cases, the environmental factor is undermined in favor of developmental activities.*

*The Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project is a large dam building project intended to provide irrigation and hydroelectricity for the country. Unfortunately, the project didn't prioritised the environmental repercussion of both downstream and upstream. Although an environmental impact assessment was conducted, it was not sufficient to understand the dynamic and complex ecological settings of the region and the impact of the dam on nearby residents. In response, various committees were appointed by the national government to assess the condition of the region and the LSHEP, but the local people and civil society organisation were not satisfied with the report of the committee. Consequently, various organisations protested against the project to protect the environment and the basic human rights of the individual. Despite prolong protest, they were unsuccessful in stopping the constructional activities. This paper aims to shed light on new parameters and understanding regarding such pertinent issues of the LSHEP and its responsibilities and vulnerabilities on nature.*

**Introduction** - Development is desirable for humankind, which denotes a process of change. Usually, development is viewed from the economic standpoint, but the multidimensional nature of development is often ignored by intellectuals and members of civilized societies. Therefore, the concept of development and infrastructure building projects should always be subject to critical scrutiny. Dam building is one such developmental initiative aimed at prospering the nation, but national leaders often overlook the negative impacts of such projects on humans and the environment.

The Northeast comprises eight states, including Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim. The region is characterized by unique socio-cultural and biological peculiarities. Its strategic geographical location at the confluence of Southeast, South, and East Asian regions makes it strategically important to the national government. The whole region is connected by a chain of international borders, sharing a total of 46000 km of international boundaries with its neighboring states, including China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

The region's diverse geography and socio-economic diversity provide it with unique characteristics. The almost 262,000 sq km region is linked to mainland India through a 21 km narrow corridor known as the Siliguri corridor, connecting Northeast India to the rest of India (Menon et al. 2003,3)

Two perennial rivers, Brahmaputra and Barak, make the Northeast a fertile land for water resources. The Brahmaputra, considered one of the mightiest rivers in the world, originates from the Tibetan plateau, crossing over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bangladesh, and merging with the Bay of Bengal. The mighty Brahmaputra travels 2,880 km and carries huge sediments, securing fourth place in the world regarding water discharge. The Barak is also a trans- boundary river that originates from the state of Manipur and passes through Southern Assam before flowing into Bangladesh.

To harness the untapped water resources of the region, the government of the country turned its attention to constructing dams. In August 1998, the GOI announced a hydro-power development policy. In May 2003, some courses of action were taken by the national government to produce 50,000 MW of hydroelectricity (Sharma, 2019, 318,320) After realizing the region's potent developmental trajectory, Northeast India has been designated as the nation's future powerhouse, with an ambitious plan to host at least 168 hydroelectric projects, totaling an installed capacity of 63,328 MW, as per the Central Electricity Authority report of 2001. States like Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are leading this charge, actively engaging in signing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with power developers. By October 2010, the government of Arunachal Pradesh had allocated 132 projects to both public and private sector entities, with a combined installed capacity of 40,140.5 MW ( Vagholikar, 2011, 360 )

After analyzing the pernicious repercussions of the LSHEP, civil society organisations and media houses raised awareness of the incident among the masses, and the environmental impact was assessed by the affected people. Such dam-building projects can prove to be a threat to the fragile ecosystem of the Northeast. This paper will discuss the environmental adversity caused by such projects.

**LSHEP an overview** - Modern technologies have enabled human beings to maintain a certain standard of living, ensuring a path towards comfortable living. Large dam building projects are based on the requirements of providing necessary living standards, ensuring irrigation facilities and generating hydroelectric power. The discourse between development and underdevelopment occupies a great deal of currency among intellectuals and civil society organisations. Development projects, in general, and dam building projects, in particular, cover a wide range of intended and unintended ecological consequences. Such projects involve planning and managing the water resources of the nation, which carries interdisciplinary and integrated holistic outlooks. Such planning should be carried out with antecedent empirical orderly documentation of cost-benefit analysis with the help of both science and social science, which should be a prerequisite for such ambitious projects ( Baruah , 2013, 99 ).

Among the various dam building projects in the northeastern region, the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, located in the north of the state of Assam, is being developed by NHPC, which is a 2000 MW project that costs around \$2 billion.

The historical roots of constructing the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project can be traced back to 1955 when the project was envisaged by the Brahmaputra Flood Control Commission. The primary objective of this multipurpose project is to control floods and upgrade irrigation facilities by erecting a 122m high dam near the current dam site. Because of the soft nature of the Siwalik sandstone at the proposed site, the experts searched for three alternative sites upstream. In 1977, the committee of experts took a detailed analysis of the possible merits and demerits of the three alternative sites, and the present site was chosen as suitable for dam construction. After determining the location, the board of experts took up closer studies on the height of the proposed dam, and it was reduced to

116m. After a proper detailed investigation, it was anticipated that some of the towns of Arunachal Pradesh would be flooded if the proposed height was maintained. Although an investigation was carried out regarding the height and suitability of the place of constructing the dam, it was not sufficient to conclude the plausible circumstances of the dam. In May 2000, the Brahmaputra Board handed over the NHPC to conduct the project ( NHPC).

Northeast is an ecologically complex, heterogeneous global biodiversity hotspot region. Out of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots, the submergence region of the dam comes in the Indo-Myanmar biodiversity hotspot of Eastern Himalaya which is one among 25 biodiversity hotspots worldwide. The dam build can cause catastrophes such as terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity.

The location of the project is around 70km from North Lakhimpur, lies in Garukamukh of the Dhemaji district of Assam, which resides 2.3 km upstream amidst a dense forest area comprising three reserved forests, namely the Kakoi Reserve Forest, the Dulung Reserved Forest, and the Subansiri River Forest. The dam occupies 4000 hectares of area. Such a huge project changes the socio-economic, cultural, environment and landscape of the region. Many people lose their livelihoods, many animals lose their habitat, and the environment loses its sustainability ( Baruah, Hazarika and Dutta, 2009, 836)

**Ecological impact on downstream** - Humans and the environment both are intrinsically interwoven change of one part subsequently changes the dynamics of the preceding part. In simple terminology, ecological politics stress the collectivity of human society and mother nature. It focuses on the interaction of nature with social structure and human organisation, emphasising the interaction between policies, power, and ecology ( Das, 2021, 195)

Post post-independence period of India is associated with trauma and the disgruntled economic status of the nation. Diligent efforts were taken by the national leaders for the myriad of development for the country ( Adhia, 2015, 18) In the post-independence period debate between development and environmentalism occupied a predominant position. Jawaharlal Nehru the first prime minister of India considered the dam as the temple of modern India ( Harshey) But the environmentalist always suspicious of the downstream impact which includes floods and, the devastation of biodiversity, debates over the building of the big dam and their social and ecological cost always remained a high-priority area from the Nehruvian era ( The Hindu, 2015 )

In the northeast dam building is operational for the full utilisation of the water resources of the area

which includes the Ranganadi Dam, Subansiri Dam, Umiam Dam, Wmrong Dam etc ( India WRIS ) All the dams have more or less both positive and negative impacts but in this paper, emphasis will be put on the negative Impact of the ecological dimension of the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project on its downstream. Rather than fossil fuel hydropower pretends to be a clean and green energy source but diverts the focus towards hydropower as a source of green energy is always associated with a question among environmentalist about the so-called greenness of hydel projects since their reservoir emits a mammoth amount of greenhouse gases which includes the emission of carbon dioxide, Methane etc. these gases are the vigorous factor of raising global warming and climate change. During the construction activities Green greenhouse gas emissions common as well as complex should follow pre-requisite guidelines and understanding the dynamics of greenhouse gas emissions by hydroelectric projects can help mitigate the problem( Ghosh et al. 2023, 5 ) Along with the greenhouse gas emissions, hydel projects also have another disreputable impact on the environment including floods, earthquake, landslides etc. Giant projects like dam building always prove to be non-beneficial for the region like Northeast as this area is highly diverse in ecological settings, home to various endangered and endemic species, and covered with plenty of different vegetation and species including tropical evergreen to temperate forest, grassland and wetland ( Patir et al. 2023, 3 ) The construction of a dam can prove to be fatal to one of the most complex, fragile ecosystems in the world. Dam building can impose impediments to both downstream as well as upstream regions it influences the natural flow of river water by holding back the sediments. It minimises the nutrients of the water and puts pressure on the aquatic life ( Das, 2021, 196 ) Because of construction dams endangered species like Masheer fish, river dolphin, and snow trout face grave danger. A report published by the Ministry of Environment and Forest shows the hostile effects of the dam on aquatic species. The report reveals that the dam impedes the natural routes of the Mahseer and snow trout which migrated from the upper course for breeding and feeding ( Barooah, 2015 ) The dam construction project also changes the quality of the river water the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project changes the chemical formation of the river water these changes pose a threat to the aquatic biodiversity by changing the natural properties of water like changes in temperature, PH, total suspended solids ( TSS), total dissolved solids (TDS), Conductivity, hardness, dissolved oxygen etc. Assam is prone to natural disasters especially floods due to a large network of river system .The Brahmaputra and Barak rivers have almost 50 tributaries which causes floods during monsoon ( Water Resource Department ) Subansiri River which is a tributary of Brahmaputra

created landslides and floods in 5 blocks of Lakhimpur district for many years. The blocks include Kadam blocks, subansiri blocks, North Lakhimpur blocks, Gugamukh blocks, Narilur blocks and Bihpuria block. Since 1950 Subansiri River naturally created a flood on the bank of the river. The government constantly failed to mitigate such havoc. Despite the potential risks, the government forged ahead with the construction of a dam in the region, which only served to heighten the anxiety and fear among the local population. In the event of dam failure, nearly 968 downstream villages would be flooded. However, during every monsoon season, NHPC releases excess water from the reservoir to maintain pressure. Unfortunately, such releases can sometimes cause heavy flooding downstream. Furthermore, the region is located in seismic zone 'V', which means that if a heavy earthquake were to strike the area, it would pose an irreversible threat. ( Baruah, 2013, 100-101 ). Recently on 28 October 2023, the people near the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project experienced a traumatic experience due to the landslide. . The landslide blocked the one diversion tunnel which reduced the flow of water by blocking its course and dried the Subansiri River, affecting the aquatic biodiversity ( The Arunachal Times, 2023 ). Regarding the natural vegetation of the Subansiri foothill, the tree Chil or Chir is prominent vegetation in the Himalayas foothills while Sal is a valuable green tree in the North. Oak and Rhododendron are common at higher elevations, and shrubby vegetation is abundant between 10,000 ft and 14000 ft. In the plain of Arunachal Pradesh, dense mixed semi-evergreen, evergreen and wet deciduous vegetation is found due to heavy monsoon rainfall, temperature, and fertile soil while Hollong is the most common tree among the evergreen trees. The growth of vegetation and the suitability of the vegetation are affected by the flooding and sedimentation of the region to a great extent the vegetational pattern changes due to the loss of soil fertility .The crop pattern also changes due to the degradation of the crop field and changes in the water quality and its nutritional values ( Baruah et al. 2009 ) .The EIA report of the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project was biased as its assessment report was prepared based on data gathered within 10km of the radius. Furthermore, the report doesn't consider the impact of the project on its downstream Dhemaji and Lakhimpur which are situated 40km from the dam site. Several studies were conducted between 2011 and 2017. . In 2011 the planning commission constituted an expert committee consisting of 2 members, In the same year NHPC also took the initiative to constitute a joint steering committee for studying and suggesting practical remedial measures in the downstream areas. Although in 2012 NHPC submitted its report the report was criticised as ' rather ambivalent'



Dr Dhreepad Choudhury who was an ecologist and former scientist at ICIMOD argued for an independent EIA and technical reassessment at regular intervals. Such reassessment will increase the credibility of the project as well as overcome the effect of the project faced by downstream dwellers.

In 2015, A committee was constituted under the Ministry of Power. The committee hold its members from both the Northeast and the Centre. The two groups submitted two contradictory reports. Where the central government group gives a green signal to the project the Northeastern group provides quite opposite arguments. With a failed resolution, the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change constituted another committee based on the National Green Tribunal. The newly formed committee is associated with three experts from different fields' seismology, geology, and hydrology. Three different experts assessed the different dimensions of the project and submitted their detailed report in 2017. The committee also provided their utmost optimism to the project and after 8 years the project resumed its work ( Borderlines, 2023 )

**The role of civil society organization and LSHEP** -The role of civil society organisations in a democratic country is to protest and resist government initiatives which initiatives may harm the ecosystem and individual lives. Although dam-building projects are meant to realize a nation's full potential, they can also have negative consequences. In India, civil society groups are often anxious to protect their regions from such projects, which they view as a threat. Colonialism may not be an ordering feature of the present-day world, but the drain of wealth and internal colonial apparatus described by Dadabhai Naoroji is still prevalent within sovereign territories like India. This has triggered civil society groups to take a proactive role in protecting their regions.

One such project is the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project in India, which is ambitious in terms of national development but lacks regional development. Such projects are often resisted on environmental and human rights grounds. In 2001, the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti ( KMSS) and the All Assam Student Union (AASU) organised a protest against the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, pressuring the union and state governments and NHPC to conduct a proper downstream impact assessment. The organisations protested the dam's perceived threats from natural calamities like earthquakes and landslides. They argued that the dam is located in an earthquake-prone zone and its seismic parameters are not competent to prevent an earthquake of 8.5 or above. They also criticized the project's lack of environmental safety measures and the fact that it was given

environmental clearance without proper cumulative impact assessment. It is also argued that the organizations failed to integrate themselves with the affected people, which limited their ability to mobilize local support and shape their movement as a mass movement. To address these issues, the protesting organizations demanded the constitution of a multidisciplinary committee with members who have a holistic understanding of the region from culture to polity. They also protested the government of Assam's decision to appoint technical experts from Switzerland to scrutinize the technical proficiency of the project (Hazarika, 2020). Various organizations protest against giant dam-building projects to vindicate their interests and protect socio-economic and environmental sustainability for the sake of human beings.

**Concluding Remarks-**The human race is evolving to achieve its highest level of development. From the ancient hunting-gathering society to the present age of artificial intelligence, the developmental task has been characterized by many ups and downs. Dam building, which has provided a blueprint for achieving developmental goals, is associated with various constraints such as socio-economic, cultural, and ecological factors. However, these constraints can be minimized through various means, allowing for a more positive impact of dam building projects.

This paper extensively discusses the negative impact of the Lower Subansiri dam-building project on the environment. Despite facing numerous critical appraisals, the project also has positive impacts. The Lower Subansiri project ensures sound infrastructure, transportation, and employment among the masses, and has the potential to utilize the natural water resources of the region. However, efforts should be made to lower the negative impact of the project by conducting comprehensive, empirical pre and post-impact assessments of the dam by a group of experts with a holistic approach. Consultation between the government and other stakeholders should be conducted at various decision-making levels, and meetings among the project stakeholders should be held at regular intervals. The World Commission on Dams also emphasizes efficiency, equity, transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making at various levels of the decision-making process.

Projects should be sensitive to maintaining human rights, including the rights of workers and nearby dwellers, and should aim to maintain ecological sustainability. The Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project should be aware of the environmental cost of the project and should explore various

alternative measures to ameliorate issues related to water quality and aquatic biodiversity. To protect the environment from dam-building projects, the government of India has taken various actions. The enactment of the Dam Safety Act, 2021 provides a comprehensive framework for ensuring the safety and operational efficiency of dams in the country. The Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) has also been executed to enhance the safety and operational efficiencies of existing dams in India.

The Dam Safety Act, 2021 also provides institutional mechanisms to set up safety parameters for dams at both the central and state levels, including the establishment of the National Committee of Dam Safety (NCDS) and the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) at the central level ( PIB Delhi )

The Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project is a large dam situated in a very strategic biological cultural, and social hotspot. Proper planning, resource management, decision-making, and a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis can help the region and local people realize the positive effects of the dam. The civil society group and intellect of the region should be vigilant regarding government policy measures and should understand the dynamics and complexities of the project. The civil society group should ensure that the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project is not a means of capitalist exploitation, but also a means for the livelihood upliftment of the local people of the region.

In conclusion, the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project imposes significant environmental costs, but these costs can be minimized if the above-mentioned procedures are followed by the stakeholders. Development, which is a part of human evolution, and dam building, a part of the developmental trajectory, cannot be undermined. However, such projects should be sympathetic towards humans and the environment and be optimistic about maintaining environmental sustainability by reducing environmental costs.

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## Irresistible Transformation: Exploring the Cultural Shifts Among the Paniya Tribes of Nilgiri District

Silpa G Nair & Zuvairiya Nassar

### ABSTRACT

*Paniya tribes are considered as the 'Aboriginal forest dwellers' of the lower slopes of Nilgiri hills and are listed under the 'Particularly Vulnerable Groups' by Government of India due to their poor living condition. The community has traditionally lived in close-knit forest-dwelling societies with distinctive rituals practises during life cycle events. The interference of non-tribal groups along with government policies made a profound transition in their cultural practises. Hence, this study aims to shed light on the transformative processes, examining the complex interplay of external influences and internal adaptations that have shaped the Paniya cultural landscape. In addition, it tries to unearth the ways in which these shifts have influenced their social structures, belief systems, and ritual practises. Qualitative research method was employed to comprehend the study objectives, such that in-depth interview with 10 participants were done. Semi structured interview guide was used to collect information on the aspect of cultural change. The findings show a nuanced picture on the means employed by them in maintaining their traditional way of life while assimilating the aspects of modernity.*

**Key words:** Paniyan, Assimilation, Cultural shift, Particularly Vulnerable Groups

### BACKGROUND

The Scheduled Tribal population of Tamil Nadu is found to be 794,697 and broadly spread across 38 districts in which 6 tribes were grouped as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' (PVTGs), for the fact of their population remaining either static or decline (Ganesh et al 2021, 404). The six PVTGs are Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyas, and Kattunayakas. Paniyans, the poorest of the poor among tribal communities are found in the parts of southern India particularly in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Generally, they belong to Dravidian race yet, are believed to have originated from Africa, as the European planting community brought their ancestors to work in the estates of Malabar. However, such argument lacks authenticity and scientific evidences (Anandakumar & Ramakrishnan 2020,57).

With reference to the state of Tamil Nadu, Paniyas are hailing on the lower western slope of the Nilgiris district in the Gudalur (18 settlements) and Pandalur (47 settlements) taluks up to an altitude of 1200 meters. They are considered as the 'Aboriginal forest dwellers', working primarily as labourers on tea and coffee plantations. Their willingness to serve as tools in the hands of sneaky perpetrators among the Nilgiri settlers is a result of their poverty and lack of self-respect (Anandakumar & Ramakrishnan 2020,53). The children of Paniyas hardly go to school as the parents aren't aware of the significance of education and consider spending money on school- to buy uniform, bags and other stationaries as mere waste, instead spend it to meet the demands of their daily livelihood (Anandakumar & Ramakrishnan 2020,54). Literary evidences at times have described the Paniyas as the slave tribe of South India because of the fact that their life juggles between hunger and work ((Anandakumar & Ramakrishnan 2020,58). Though Paniya community intends to retain their traditional nature, changes continue to exist in their life cycle rituals. They are currently experiencing a battle between tradition and modernity. Therefore, it is important to examine how their cultural traditions have changed and continued over time.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the traditional ritual practises involved in the life cycle of a Paniyan tribe.
2. To examine the cultural shift transpiring in the life cycle rituals of a Paniyan tribe.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study is qualitative in nature which employed narrative research as a strategy of inquiry to understand the aspects of life cycle rituals. It enables the researchers to reach detailed information in its natural setting and aids in interpreting the data.

### *Sampling*

Using purposive sampling technique, data was collected from 10 participants residing in Ezhumuram, Gudalur district of Niligiri hills, Tamil Nadu. Out of which 4 belonged to the age category of 60 and above to comprehend the traditional practises involved in the life cycle events. The remaining 6 participants of age group 20-40 were selected to understand the practises in current scenario. Both young and old informants were purposively selected to bring out the intricate dynamics involved in their life cycle events.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The guide had questions such as talk about your ritual practises? How are women treated during puberty? etc. followed by probing questions. Consent was received from the participants; data confidentiality was assured and permission to record the interview was obtained. The collected data was translated verbatim followed by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006, 3). In addition to field data, information was gathered from the secondary sources available in Tribal Research Centre, Udhagamandalam. The study findings comprehended the cultural shifts transpiring in the traditional rituals of Paniya tribe.

## RESULTS

### Naming Ceremony:

The naming ceremony is the foremost ritual to any individual born in the Paniya community. As a customary practice, the newborn child was named only after the completion of 4 months, by the child's mother amidst invitees especially in the presence of the settlement head. An age-old respondent stated that *'In earlier days, the sister of the child's mother occupied a predominant role and it was mandatory to invite her as the first invitee to the naming ceremony' (P7)*. The boring of the ears of both sexes were done at the *'Bhagavathi'* temple in the presence of mother's sisters and at least one female relative from Wayanad region the following month.

In the present era, there are evidences of transition in the naming and ear-piercing ceremony, such that the child is named immediately within a month of birth by the parents. One of the study respondents gave the rationality behind naming them immediately after birth, *'Nowadays, we don't hold naming ceremonies as major occasions because the hospital authority asks for the child's name right away to record the birth certificate' (P1)*. However, few Paniyan families prefer to name their child during the Annaprasan ceremony (first rice-eating ceremony) i.e., a ritual practise of feeding the child with solids, performed predominantly by non-tribal groups. Another respondent asserted that *'The ritual duties of naming ceremony is vested with the maternal uncle as he feeds and names the child in a temple at their locality'*. Therefore, it is apparent that through time, the practises of naming ceremony accustomed by non-tribal groups are steadily integrating into the Paniyan community.

### Puberty

Seclusion is a social convention that is pervasive among Paniyan tribes at the time of puberty. It was observed that the girl at the onset of her menstruation, was made to hide into a corner of the hut. A



respondent claimed that *'The pubertal girl was not completely isolated from family rather would stay without seeing male members for seven days'* (P10). Until the first seven days, the menstruating girl was regularly served with a sweet prepared of rice or ragi flour mixed with coconut scrapings. Another respondent asserted that *'Cleansing bath would be given at the end of 7<sup>th</sup> day... her old clothes along with a black cloth would be burnt in front of their house... only after which she was allowed to enter the kitchen and prayer room'* (P6).

On the next day, girl would wear a new saree bought by her mother's sister, a vegetarian feast followed by presenting money as a token of love was noticed. Within a month of the first menstruation a ceremony called *'neevedukkal'* was performed. *'During the ceremony the girl would stand on a banana leaf positioned over paddy... cow's urine would be placed on her left side.... then pray to the spirits for good health and prosperity'* (P8).

Participants of the study revealed that there isn't much changes in the Puberty related practises among the Paniya community. *'The elders in the locality are informed immediately when the girl attains puberty, and will be surrounded by female relatives and neighbours as an expression of joy'* (P3). Following this, the girl is prepared to take bath, food called *'Kali'* is fed and wear traditional Paniyan dress. The notion of *'Theetu kalithal'* is ingrained as a part of being polluted during the period of menses even in current scenario. *'During every month of menstruation, the girl should sleep on separate bed, pillow and use separate objects until the menstrual cycle gets over'* (P1). In order to symbolize purity, the girl will have to wash and clean up all those things used by her for those days of menses. Having said that, the influence of education has minimised the restrictions imposed on them during menses, as they are obliged to continue the schooling or college even during the menstrual cycle.

### Marriage

Marriage by negotiation was the chief mode of acquiring mates among Paniyan tribes, wherein the father, paternal uncle and few close relatives of the groom visit the bride's house without mentioning the alliance subject. If they prefer the bride, they make few more trips and only in the 5th visit, they fix the day for betrothal ceremony, referred as *'Valli vekkal'* or *'Panam kettu Kalyana'* meaning presentation of bride wages. A respondent elaborated the traditional way of marriage ceremony as *'Amidst elders of the settlement, the groom's mother would tie a rupee coin in one corner of the girl's waist cloth, called mundu... ties a white cloth around the breast portion, followed by a vegetarian feast'* (P6). After betrothal

ceremony, the groom would visit once in a week, to his future father-in-law's house with a head load of fire-wood, betel leaves, nuts and tobacco, continues till the marriage is fixed.

The marriage referred as '*tiruvana kettu kalyanam*' would take place in the boy's place, with relatives of both the families. Followed by the feast, dance and music; all the relatives offer presents to bride and groom. Culturally, the Paniyan people uphold endogamous marriage traditions while strictly prohibiting exogamy. Although monogamy is prevalent among them, there is no societal objection to a man having multiple wives as long as he can adequately provide for them, reflecting a nuanced approach to marital practises within the Paniyan social structure.

The practise of marriage by negotiation is still evident but the fact of serving and visiting the future father-in-law's house until marriage is altered. A respondent recounted about engagement practice as '*Once both the families like each other, they proceed with 'Kalla kattal' wherein the groom's family as a symbol of conformation will offer a garland to the bride (P10)*'. The wedding nowadays happens either in the girl's house or in the temple as per convenience amidst the headmen, elders of the tribe, relatives and family members.

In contemporary scenario, marriage by elopement is prevalent and a participant posited that '*The Paniyan family these days are supportive of love marriages, as the youth meet their partners in colleges or workplace much earlier (P4)*'. When it comes to familial acceptance of such marriages, few are progressive that they support and acknowledge it. On contrary there are families that perceive love marriages would dilute their cultural richness and thereby devalue and abandon the couple from the entire community.

The influence of non-tribal groups has thinned the ritual activities with regard to marriage such that the bride does not wear the traditional costume on the day of wedding rather wear a saree and the groom presents a chain called '*thali*' - representing the Tamil Hindu cultural wedding practice. Marrying outside the community was once disregarded but now, exogamous marriages are acknowledged. As a result of the acclimatization with the outside world monogamous marriages are strictly followed as they became aware that it is illegal to have two or more wives at a time, without legal divorce.

### Pregnancy

The pregnancy itself creates certain limitations on the movement of women within and outside the settlement along with certain prenatal taboos. The first delivery would take place in the husband's house and the hospital expenses were met by him. During the 9th month of the pregnancy a ceremony called '*pootiyattu*' was done in order to remove all the evil spirits entered in the pregnant women. They have their

own midwives called *pill pichikka vati* (she who hold the child) to assist the child's birth. A respondent recited that *'During those day, placenta was collected by midwives in an earthen pot covered with black cloth and then buried under the back side of the courtyard, after which presents like betel leaf, coconut oil, tobacco and cash would be given to midwife'* (P9).

They consider the birth of a child as a gift of their ancestors in which child of both the genders were welcomed without any discrimination. They observe pollution for ten days immediately after child birth in which father would not consume fish or meat and the mother was also renounced from the household work to look after the child. The father and other male relatives were not allowed to touch the child for 39 days after delivery, also parents were refrained from sexual intercourse for 9 months after child birth.

Now a gradual shift is evident in the pregnancy related matters, where the delivery in the house is shifted to hospital. One of the respondents rehearsed that *'Those days the midwives were taking care of pregnancy who usually will be the eldest one of the family or localities. My mother's pregnancy was at home but ours is all at hospitals'* (P5). The leading source of such change is the existence of Primary Health Centres (PHCs) as door to door survey on the number of pregnant women are taken. And if pregnant, registration under the PHC's for regular check-ups are made mandate. *'PHC is located at 3 kms distance from my house, but for those Paniya's from interior parts of Gudalur district, it is far away'* (P1). Having said that, the entire Paniya community find difficulty to access maternity hospitals, irrespective of the locality due to remoteness.

Instances where the women being reluctant to share their pregnancy news to others were evident from the field. Also, they avoid visiting hospitals until second trimester, mainly due to the lack of awareness on maternal health and such attitudes increase the birth complications and worsen their health condition. *'Many of our fellows won't reveal their pregnancy up to five months in a fear that something will happen to their child when others come to know'* (P4). The possession of an Aadhaar card being a prerequisite for availing treatment remain as a challenge in accessing primary healthcare services. However, the study notes that many women from the Paniya community do not have this essential identification document, effectively excluding them from mainstream healthcare services and perpetuating their vulnerability.

#### Funeral ceremony

Rituals associated with death are most significant event among the Paniyan community. One respondent explained the traditional way of funeral ceremony as *'The toes and thumbs of the dead would be tied with a string... then intimate the news to the headman, matrilineage and finally to all others in the*

*community. Once the mourners had arrived, a bier made of banana stems and bamboo sticks would be made... the relatives bath the corpse... then place it on the bier. Small amount of paddy on the banana leaf, bowl of coconut water and oil lighted wick lamp would be placed near...the lineage people pour few drops of coconut water into its mouth and body is rolled into mat then carried to burial ground' (P9).*

Usually the dead would be buried, but there were cases of cremation as well, especially to those who lived within the farm compound of their Hindu masters. Death pollution was observed for seven days, during which, none resides in the house of the dead but in relative's house. For seven days *kanji* (porridge) would be placed on the roof of the house and eldest son clap and calls for the crow to eat; for the departed soul to get matured. A consecrated thread would be tied around the arms of the eldest son of the dead (chief mourner), with a belief that the spirit of dead would not harm him.

Even today, the funeral practises are stringently followed without much changes. Participants responded that the Paniya community is very keen in performing the death rituals such that the corpse will be covered with a mat with favourite dress, food, fruits etc., and then coconut water will be offered by family members and close relatives. *'If a person in our community dies, immediately people from different localities are informed and almost everybody will make their presence and be a part of condolence' (P1).* The people of Paniyan community prefer to bury the dead than cremation ideally at the night time after sunset. Additionally, a respondent stated that *'The name of our priest is 'Maniyatti' and he will perform all the rituals on the corpse while other Paniyan will dance and sing the traditional song outside his house' (P4).* When compared to death ceremony the death anniversary is celebrated in a great way at deceased's home with music, dance and feast.

#### Religious Practises

The Paniyan belief system involves supernatural creatures, each having its own name and identity. They pray customarily to access the source of power and to fulfil their desires. The supernatural beings worshipped are predominantly of two kinds namely, *the ancestral spirits and the tribal deities*. The Paniyan tribe of Nilgiris district are fervent believers of animism (spiritual beings). A respondent stated that *'We believe the souls of dead people live on animals or plants as spirits and roam freely across settlements' (P6).*

Temples and shrines exist with layers of stones and pebbles under trees, for both ancestral spirits and non-human spirits. *'Kulikan'*- male soul of a Paniyan legendary hero, perceived to provide prosperity is represented in stone image under the tree. *'Velliyyam'*- female soul, *'Thampuratty'* and *'Kattu-bhavathi'*

are also worshipped. The 'attali', a Paniyan shaman, mediator between spirits and community who chants mantras, sings and dances to conduct rituals. He'd wear female dress, talk in female voice in front of the shrine to invoke 'KattuBhagavathi'. The devils were worshipped in different forms and black magic with extreme faith is practised.

Religious practises of the present generation vary on the basis of their geographical location. There is a place named 'Bokapuram' where Paniyan of Gudalur and Pandalur visit occasionally and offer prayer. Each clan will worship their own deity with the belief that their ancestral spirits reside in them. It is evident from the field research that even today their mode of religion is Animism. *'There is no form to our God, and instead worship a stone, which we consider as our deity and believe that our ancestral spirit resides in it' (P1)*. Another participant asserted that *'We also place a stone under a tree and consider it as temple for our locality and offer prayers there' (P2)*. Having said that, nowadays a meagre amount of people has started to worship 'Mariamma', 'Kaliamma' and 'Karuppasamy'. A respondent revealed that *'Puja room of my house has a culmination of all Hindu Gods like Murugan, Vinayaka, Ayyappan etc., however our ancestral spirit is in the form of a stone' (P3)*. It is obvious that the influence of other religious groups and practises exist among the Paniya community.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Change is an inevitable law of nature which is irreplaceably attributed to tribal societies. In the same respect, this study found that in Paniya community cultural shifts and explicit changes are evident due to the combination of various factors, including exposure to the wider community, changing social and economic conditions, urbanization, westernization, modernization and government policies. The virtue of Paniya community trying to adapt to modern culture by retaining the traditional values and its associated cultural practises, is viewed through the lens of a theory named 'A Synthesis of tradition and modernity' by Radhakamal Mukherjee. The Paniya tribe possess a remarkable capacity accustomed to modern influences, including changes in lifestyle, technology, and economic activities; when engaged with the broader spectrum of multicultural groups. The interaction and coexistence of tradition and modern elements in them is evident from the study, as they are cautious in preserving the core aspects of their traditional cultural identity while incorporating modern ideologies and influences.

The cultural practises of the Paniya community serve as a reflection of their collective identity and play a crucial role in shaping their customs, traditions, and daily practises. The community's cultural

practises are characterized by various rituals associated with significant life events such as birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy, and death. These customs serve as a means of maintaining social cohesion and reinforcing their unique cultural identity within the community. However, as the community interacts more with the mainstream population, cultural shifts are inevitable, particularly in the context of life cycle rituals.

Beginning with the naming ceremony, few changes are evident as they name the newborn much earlier at hospitals itself. Also, traditionally the maternal aunt was given importance and due to mainstream patriarchal influences, the shift towards maternal uncle is evident from this study. With regards to pubertal rituals, even in current scenario, the idea of purity and pollution is entrenched within the community. However, the influence of formal education has minimised the alienation experienced by menstruating girl. The institution of marriage has begun to coexist between endogamous and exogamous nature that includes both love marriages and marriage through negotiation. Also, the present generation are strictly adherent to monogamous marriage.

Advancement in the field of healthcare had brought about changes in the aspect of pregnancy and its associated practises, such that midwives are replaced by professional health practitioners. The ritual practise involved in the death ceremony remains more or less rooted than assimilating with the practises of other communities. The nature of being in constant touch with outside world, had diluted their belief system such that inclusion of Hindu Gods is obvious, as it is attached to their belief in ancestral spirits.

The intricate relationship between tradition and modernity in the community is reflected in these cultural changes. They frequently attempt to strike a balance between the opportunities and difficulties occurring due to social, economic, and environmental changes and the preservation of their cultural heritage as they acclimate to new conditions. Having said that, the presence of cultural continuity lays the connection with the past and draw upon traditional wisdom and values to guide the process of modernization. There exist a constant and sincere effort from the tribe to arbitrate between the opposite poles of tradition and modernity as transformation remains irresistible.

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**Protest Politics of Student Collectives in India: Historicising Students’  
Contentious Engagements in Colonial, Post-Colonial and Post-Liberalisation Periods**

**Soudh Ismail**

**Abstract:** *The educated youths have always played a vivacious role in Indian politics and have been active agents of social change in colonial and post-independent periods. This paper examines the dynamic role of student collectives in Indian politics by tracing their protest articulation across three historical junctures: colonial, post-colonial, and post-liberalisation periods. Through mapping the historical trajectory of student mobilisations in the mentioned periods, the paper argues that the contentious articulations of students are deeply influenced by broader socio-political transformations in Indian society, where specific protest episodes reflect students’ critical responses to these changes. Although student collectives were responding to the opportunities and constraints of immediate political contexts, their action repertoires, organisational networking, and collective claim-makings were orchestrated by the available mobilisational resources of the specific periods. Thus, the paper highlights how the anti-colonial framework and values shaped protests in the colonial era, followed by a dominance of instrumentalist action in the immediate post-independence period. Subsequently, the paper discusses how mobilisational dynamics underwent a significant shift in the 1990s, with students’ critical engagements with issues such as Mandal reforms, Hindutva politics, and liberalisation policies.*

**Key Words:** student activism, protest politics, post-colonialism, higher education, mobilisation

**Introduction**

Understanding the nature and dynamics of student mobilisations and their contingent engagements is a task of multiple dimensions. The term student politics itself is a generic one that has varied manifestations. Among its diverse avatars, students’ protest politics through activisms, campaigns, and mobilisations are more expressive and vibrant. Philip G. Altbach observed student activism as ‘a highly complex, multi-faceted phenomenon which is difficult to explain and even more problematic to predict’ (Altbach 1989, 97). Students’ protest politics can never be taken as a phenomenon of the 1960s, even though they gained much scholarly attention during the ‘turbulent decade’. A plethora of studies have

looked at the frequency and longevity of student mobilisation and their dynamic engagements with university authorities and governments of various regions. Scholars have unfolded the structural and cultural reasons for frequent student unrest in various countries and identified the role of academic institutions and their political culture in facilitating mobilisations in campus spaces (Altbach 1989; Klemencic & Park 2018; Martelli & Garalyte 2020). An overarching comparison that can be made to analyse the regional character of student movements would be through demarcating student mobilisations between the Global South and Global North, which have seen varied student campaigns in relation to the political developments of those regions. This provincial categorisation has provided scholars with distinctive regional particularities to contextualise the character of individual mobilisations and compare movement dynamics in relation to the political history of particular regions (Altbach 1970, 76).

Unlike the Western liberal democracies, where students constitute a minimal structuring force in organised collective actions, barring some contentious episodes, the post-colonial nations have witnessed students' active political involvement since the anti-colonial movement. National consciousness and anti-colonial sentiments constituted a central mobilisational frame for student campaigns in Asia and Africa during the colonial period. Students who received modern education in colonies articulated their dissent through modern frameworks, popularised nationalist sentiments through their campaigns and provided leadership to the movements and subsequent government formations. Third-world nations, as diverse as India, Indonesia, Kenya, Vietnam and Burma, have witnessed impeccable student participation in their nationalist movements (Altbach 1970, 78). By analysing the nature of student movements in post-colonial nations, Altbach has observed that the spectrum of student dissent in these regions is diverse and broad, with ideologies ranging from most revolutionary Marxist theories to Islamic fundamentalism. He notes, 'Sophisticated ideological rhetoric characterises some student movements while others have no discernible perspective. Some movements aim to overthrow the government, while others are concerned with poor conditions in the dormitories' (Altbach 1989, 107). The long-standing critical engagements of student collectives with issues such as anti-colonialism and national self-determination have provided historical legitimacy for student cohorts to conduct political campaigns in post-independence years. Nevertheless, these participations were limited to cliental politics in some countries where contentious campaigns were disregarded by the newly formed political elites (Bidegain and von Bülow 2020, 362)

### **Contentious Politics of Student Collectives in India: Understanding the Historical Context**

Indian student movements hold irreplaceable relevance among the post-colonial nations as the student campaigns initiated in the colonial period have not only shaped the character of student protests in post-independent India but also determined student agitations in contemporary Pakistan and Bangladesh. Students' political campaigns were popularised in India during the colonial period, and their participation in the national struggles concomitantly provided a legitimate space for mobilisation in the post-independent years. Students initiated multifarious protest events in universities and participated massively in all-India campaigns. Various colleges and universities were the breeding grounds of mobilisation during the period, where these campus spaces provided a connective link between national leaders and educated youths through a series of protest demonstrations (Altbach 1966, 452). However, student movements have categorically transformed along with the political dynamics of post-independent decades and have derailed meticulously from the colonial period's action repertoires and collective claim-makings. Multifarious contentious episodes have happened in Indian campus spaces during the post-independence period. These protest campaigns were preoccupied with academic and socio-economic issues of individual campuses, and the mobilisational frames were very well connected to the political history of respective regions. Mobilisational dynamics of Indian student movements also underwent a categorical shift in the 1990s, where students' critical engagements with contentious issues like Mandal reforms, Hindutva politics and liberalisation policies transformed the collective culture of universities and paved the way for new political articulations in Indian campus spaces.

Hence, to conceptualise the current dynamics of student movements in India, the historical trajectory of initial student campaigns and their socio-political engagements with university authorities and ruling regimes should be carefully studied. Student protests should also be contextualised within the socio-political transformation of Indian society, where student engagements have categorically reflected the aspirations and contentions of youths in specific periods. The continuity and change that have happened to student protests over the decades can be further comprehended through a balanced comparison between student movements' temporal and spatial dynamics. A comparative study of student protests in universities, regions and states, with a temporal understanding of shifts in the protest repertoires of student collectives and their claim makings over the decades, provides a comprehensive canvas to historicise the protest politics of student collectives in India. To obtain these specific objectives, a broad periodisation of student movements is undertaken in this paper through a sensible categorisation of student movements into three historical junctures: a) student mobilisations in the colonial period, b)

student movements in the post-colonial period and c) student activism in the post-liberalisation period. The paper argues that although Student collectives responded to the opportunities and constraints of immediate political contexts, their action repertoires, organisational networking, and collective claim makings were well defined by the available mobilisational resources of the mentioned periods.

### **Student Mobilisations in Colonial Period: From Adapting Anti-colonial Repertoires to the Formation of Nationalist Alliances**

The anti-colonial movement has given a political identity to the student community of India. Colleges and universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras presidencies have witnessed multifarious agitations initiated by Indian students that questioned colonial governance and demanded national independence (Altbach 1966; Wilkinson 2019). The politicisation of the student community and higher education institutions reflected the emerging aspirations of the new middle classes formed in colonial India. These newly formed Western-educated Indian elites upheld the ideas of Indian nationalism and formed the leadership of the anti-colonial movement. Many nationalist leaders were educated in English colleges, and their political careers were incubated during their student years in these campus spaces. Although there was a significant trend among Indian students to align with the popular movements of Congress, various leftist and rightist organisations also had considerable student support at that period (Altbach 1966, 455). The partition of Bengal in 1905 can be considered a landmark in the history of student protests in India. Students of Calcutta's Eden Hindu hostel burned the effigy of Lord Curzon and boycotted exams in response to the British policy of partition of Bengal. Much like Bengal, Students of Maharashtra, Madras and Punjab were also active during the initial phase of the nationalist movement (Wilkinson 2019, 3). The first All-India College Students' Conference was held at Nagpur in December 1920, under Lala Lajpat Rai's leadership, to coordinate student movements in colonial India. College Students' Conference became the first networked platform to conduct solidarity meetings of student protests across regions. During the 1930s, the All India Students' Conference provided congressmen with leftist orientations a platform within the Indian National Congress (Wilkinson 2019, 8).

The All India Student Federation (AISF) was formed in 1936 to provide a unified voice for student movements in India and worked as an organisational platform to mobilise students during the colonial period. Students from various ideological strands, ranging from Marxism to Gandhian socialism, worked in AISF in the initial years and provided vibrant support to the nationalist cause. Meanwhile,

students influenced by Jinnah's idea of a separate state for Muslims formed the Muslim Students Federation in 1937. In contrast, The Hindu Student Federation unified Hindu students during the period (Wilkinson 2019, 4). In the later stage of the movement, Gandhi's non-cooperation campaign attracted many students into intense political activism. They provided a considerable workforce for demonstrations and took leadership when congress leaders got arrested. Gandhi's civil disobedience movement also attained immanent student participation, even though many radical student groups were involved in militant activities against the British Raj during the period. Students were engaged in massive constructive programmes during the Quit India movement and adopted Gandhian non-violent repertoires like *Satyagrahas* and *Dharnas* to achieve the purported demands (Altbach 1966, 451). Thus, it can be argued that despite the ideological differences, students formed respectable alliances in the nationalist campaigns and provided human and material resources in the anti-colonial protest cycles. Students adopted protest repertoires like *Satyagraha*, civil disobedience, *dharna* and boycott in their campaigns and constructed an anti-colonial nationalist consciousness among their cohorts through these contentious cycles. Hence, there was a 'unified' student movement in India during the colonial period with a strong ideological commitment to national liberation for which students were collectively fighting.

### **Students' Collective Actions in Post-Colonial Period: From Nation-Building Campaigns to Anti-Emergency Protests**

There have been tremendous changes in the nature of students' collective actions, which are on par with the expansion of higher education in post-colonial India. Soon after the independence, the struggle for controlling state power and maintaining social privilege became the central motive for the ruling elites and student mobilisations against the interests of these privileged sections were discredited through conscious efforts (Jayaram 1979; Hazary 1988; Mazumdar 2019). Meanwhile, there was an active promotion of the idea that students should be involved in 'national building' and refrain from 'destructive political campaigns' against the newly formed regimes. These concomitant efforts from the ruling elites destabilised the collective spirit of students and further led to the depoliticisation of student activism in post-independent years. On the other hand, student collectives encountered problems with academic infrastructure and educational issues, which were not as politicised as the issue of national

freedom in the colonial period. This paved the way for an instrumentalist mode of student protests in campus spaces with sporadic and unorganised agitations and further delegitimised the ideological spirit of student movements centred on national liberation during the colonial period. The immediate post-independence years have never witnessed a massive student movement of all Indian dimensions, even though student protests and mobilisations have rocked various universities and shaken many regional governments within the country (Jayaram 1979, 688). Despite the general understanding that student movements have weakened during the post-independent years with the ruling elites' deliberate actions to delegitimise their protest politics, there are hardly any serious studies conducted on the mobilisational dynamics of students in these years concerning how different political parties have used student groups for their partisan interests (Mazumdar 2019, 21).

Although several campaigns have been organised by students against extra-academic issues, such as separate statehood, corruption, Naxalite struggle, national emergency, etc., the fundamental grievances that have aggravated the students for protest mobilisations were the poor state of academic institutions and their infrastructural crunches. The Massification policy put forth by the individual governments to address the demands of Indian youths, hitherto never exposed to modern education, has resulted in both infrastructural crunch and deteriorated academic quality in Indian higher education. This structural condition facilitated the student leaders to ignite protest campaigns on the mentioned grievances and to initiate student activism in various colleges and universities (Weiner 1963, 124). A kind of mass tradition, along with intense localism, has developed within the campuses of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar since independence, transforming the culture of student politics in these north Indian states (Chopra 1978, 61 ). In the case of Jharkhand and Orissa, student agitations included the demand for better infrastructure and the non-interference of governments in academic matters (Hazary 1988, 112). In Bengal, Bihar, and Gujarat, student campaigns initiated for academic grievances have spiralled into massive mobilisations, resulting in regime changes (Shah 1964; Barik 1977). One of the initial political demands of student collectives since independence was for separate statehoods within the country, which precipitated movements for state reorganisation along with lingual boundaries. Some language-based student movements were oppositional in framing demands and had radical outlooks in their protest tactics. Students of Uttar Pradesh have initiated movements demanding the use of Hindi as the national language, whereas student politics in Tamil Nadu came into the limelight in 1965 in the state-wise agitation against the use of Hindi as the national language (Cormack 1969; Reddy 1977). Students in Telangana have played an essential role in the Telangana movement, where Osmania and Kakatiya

universities became hotbeds of student agitations for Telangana statehood (Pathania 2018, 11). Under the organisation of the All Assamese Students Union (AASU), students in Assam have carried out intensive campaigns against the growing dominance of outsiders in the state and demanded Assamese people's cultural and economic security in the region. This movement resulted in a massive victory for student leaders in the subsequent assembly election. It was the first in Indian history that a student movement captured governmental power soon after its successful diffusion (Shah 2004, 132).

Some of the states have witnessed radical student movements of broader ideological demands that have questioned the political affairs of the Indian nation-state itself. Many public universities in West Bengal were the hotbeds of Maoist ideological incubation and provided intellectual and material resources for the Maoist struggle. In the 1970s, students spearheaded the contentious campaign for the Naxalite cause, and universities in Kolkata became the hub of Naxalite turmoil, producing some of India's charismatic Maoist student leaders. Student activists of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh have also invariably supported the Naxalite movement, where Osmania and Kakatiya Universities and regional colleges conducted organised campaigns and produced leaders like George Reddy, C.V. Subbarao and Y Naveen Kumar. Universities in Kerala and Delhi also saw vibrant student mobilisations for the Naxalite cause during the 1970s and 80s (Ostergard 1985, 57). Except for students' contributions to the Naxalite struggle, the protest campaigns of student youths were weak in their ideological articulations and mobilisational networks, and a movement of all-India level was hardly perpetrated by students in the immediate post-independent years. Nevertheless, the socio-political developments of the 1970s and students' collective responses to these events resulted in a shift in Indian politics and altered the trajectory of student movements in the later decades. The Bihar student movement of 1974, carried out under the banner of *Chathra Sangarsh Samiti*, focused on broad societal issues like electoral reforms, eradication of corruption, reorganisation of the educational system, etc. and worked beyond caste and political considerations through wider youth participation (Barik 1977, 49). On the other hand, students of Gujarat took up significant societal issues such as rampant corruption, the black market, rise in price, unemployment, etc. and initiated a massive political movement that brought down the congress government from state power in 1974 (Shah 2004, 128). Thus, the student agitations in Bihar and Gujarat spiralled into a pan-Indian youth movement that demanded socio-economic reforms at the national level. Student activism received severe jolts During the internal Emergency (1975-77). The government suppressed student activism, and various student leaders were detained by the police. However, soon after the emergency, students actively campaigned for non-congress parties in the 1977

general election, which led to the defeat of Congress after their thirty years of uninterrupted rule (Jayaram 1979; Hazary 1988; Mazumdar 2019).

### **Student Activism in Post-Liberalisation Period: From Anti-Mandal Protests to Identity-based Collective Assertions**

Mobilisational dynamics of Indian student movements underwent a categorical shift in the 1990s, where students' critical engagements with contentious issues like Mandal reforms, Hindutva politics and liberalisation policies transformed the collective culture of universities and paved the way for new political articulations in Indian campus spaces. Post-1990 student mobilisations have also seen an unprecedented rise in students' contentious campaigns in various central universities and technical institutes of India. Central Universities like Delhi University (DU), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Hyderabad Central University (HCU), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Benaras Hindu University (BHU), Pondicherry University (PU), Central University of Kerala (CUK) and technical institutes like IIT Madras, IIT Bombay, IISER Pune, FTII etc. have organised vibrant student campaigns and became sites of contentious student politics in contemporary India (Chaudhari 2018; Mazumdar 2019; Chatterji 2019). There were multiple anti-privatisation protests initiated by students in campus spaces that ranged from episodic student protests against fee hikes, fellowship cuts, infrastructural issues, academic reforms and land encroachment in universities to consistent campaigns against state-induced commercialisation policies such as the Ambani-Birla Report, GATT-WTO agreement, enactment of foreign universities bill, the introduction of semester system and choice based credit system and the implementation of Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) (Das 2007; Sharma 2010; Gupta 2019). In the case of anti-liberalisation protests, the spark was mainly ignited with the demands concerned with immediate issues, and through freshly created repertoires and ideological frames, students solidified protests episodes into consistent campaigns against the broader issue of privatisation and commercialisation of higher education in India. The anti-FYUP protests in DU, the Occupy UGC movement, the Fee Must Fall campaign in JNU, and a series of anti-liberalisation protests that happened in public universities during the 1990s and 2000s are some of the remarkable protests.

Critical debates and protest mobilisations that happened during the Mandal reforms had an enduring impact on the Indian student movement. Students of Indian universities have widely participated in the debates of Caste vis a vis Merit since Mandal reforms, which created a caste-induced rupture in



university spaces, and these ruptures resulted in the formation of autonomous caste-based organisations and their political articulations in later years (Deshpande 2016, 33). Universities like HCU, JNU, BHU, IIT Madras, IIT Bombay and Pondicherry University have seen the rise of anti-caste politics since Mandal reforms. Autonomous identity-based organisations like Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA), Dalit Students Union (DSU), United Dalit Students Forum (UDSF), All India Bahujan Student Forum (AIBSF) and Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association (BAPSA) have entered the terrain of Indian student politics by unequivocally criticising both traditional right-wing as well as left-wing student organisations for their inadequate understandings on the issues of caste-based discriminations and humiliations in the higher education sector. These organisations campaigned for multiple grievances related to caste-based exclusions and demanded the proper implementation of university reservations. The protest repertoires of these collectives were vibrant and radical in their symbolisation where anti-caste figures like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Periyar E.V. Naicker, Jyotirao Phule, Savitri Bai Phule and Kanshi Ram reappeared in university politics through contentious campaigns and protest sloganeering (Pathania 2018; Kumar 2020). Contentious events like the anti-reservation protests of 1990 and 2006, the Beef festivals of the early 2010s and the justice for Rohit Vemula agitation of 2016 further expanded the domain of anti-caste politics in universities and enriched the student movements of contemporary India through autonomous political articulation and contestations.

There have been multifarious changes brought about by Hindu nationalist governments in the field of higher education in India. These changes are essentially directed by the principles of Hindutva, which came to be termed saffronisation or Indianisation of education (Taneja 2001; Marie Lall 2005). From students' collective campaigns against the Ramjanmabhoomi movement to the Justice for Rohit Vemula protest, Azadi campaign, Justice for Najeeb campaign and anti-CAA protests, students consistently engaged with Hindutva regimes and their policies of saffronisation (Gupta 2019, 7). During the 1990s, student mobilisations against Hindutva were not directly lenient to the project of saffronisation, as the Hindu nationalist National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime came into power only by the end of the 1990s. Nevertheless, from 1999 to 2004, there were multiple attempts by the Vajpayee-led NDA government to communalise higher education, which was unequivocally opposed by students (Marie Lall 2005, 236). After a decade-long break, the NDA returned to power with a full-fledged majority in parliament under the leadership of Narendra Modi. The impressive electoral victory and the rising popularity of Modi among the Indian masses gave imminent confidence to the NDA, which was reflected in its governance, policy-making and implementation. Meanwhile, the character of public

universities has changed drastically due to the structural and political transformation since the 1990s. Student resistance gained a new shape and meaning with the adaptation of fresh protest repertoires and collective frames during the period. Students not only contested the saffronisation agenda but also collectively resisted the march of majority communalism in Indian social life and held a critical position in contemporary politics by sustaining dissent against the communal projects of Hindutva regimes.

### **Conclusion**

Unlike the Western liberal democracies, the post-colonial nations have witnessed active student engagements during the nationalist movements where national consciousness and anti-colonial sentiments constituted a central mobilisational frame for student campaigns. The nationalist movement in India provided a legitimate space for Indian students to conduct campaigns during the colonial period. Various colleges and universities were the breeding grounds of mobilisation during the period, where these campus spaces provided a connective link between national leaders and educated youths through a series of protest demonstrations. Soon after the independence, The concomitant efforts from the ruling elites to destabilise the collective spirit of students led to the depoliticisation of student activism in the immediate post-independence years. Hence, the immediate post-independence decades have not seen a massive student movement of all Indian dimensions, even though student protests and mobilisations have rocked various universities and shaken many regional governments. The Massification policy put forth by the individual governments to address the demands of Indian youths has resulted in both infrastructural crunch and deteriorated academic quality in Indian higher education. This structural condition facilitated the student leaders to ignite protest campaigns on academic issues in various universities. Apart from academic-related grievances, students have organised several campaigns against extra-academic issues, such as separate statehood, corruption, Naxalite struggle, national emergency, etc., that defined the character of student protests in post-colonial India. Mobilisational dynamics of Indian student movements underwent a categorical shift in the 1990s, where students' critical engagements with contentious issues like Mandal reforms, Hindutva politics and liberalisation policies transformed the collective culture of universities and paved the way for new political articulations in Indian campus spaces.

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## **Safety Measures against Cyberbullying on Social Networking Sites: Awareness and Perception among the Teenagers of Urban India**

Sucharita Pramanick and Shovan Ghosh

### **Abstract**

*The emergence and growing prevalence of online communication are bringing forth new forms of vice in society that young people are confronting during their adolescence. In addition to conventional forms of bullying, cyberbullying is also negatively impacting their mental development. Many studies have been carried out in India on conventional forms of bullying, but only a few of them concentrate on the various facets of cyberbullying and its unique consequences. Under these circumstances, the current study tried to investigate the preparedness of the urban teens of India against cyberbullying on social networking sites based on their perceptions about sharing the incidents of cyberbullying and the use and effectiveness of the security features provided by social networking sites. For the current research, a stratified random-based questionnaire survey was conducted on 578 teenage boys and 621 teenage girls in the city of Kolkata in eastern India. The study reveals that in the future, teenagers will prefer friends, mostly as confidants to share if they ever become victims of cyberbullying on social networking sites. A decent number of teens also choose parents, but teachers are least preferred by them. A large number of teenagers have no idea regarding the fact that whether privacy policies of social networks are a reason behind cyberbullying or not. But they agree that the privacy provided by social networking sites is enough for users' safety. The involvement of teenagers in cyberbullying in urban India is a social reality, and thus society should prepare for combating it effectively by making teens aware and prepared.*

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, Teenagers, Social networking, Security measures, Perception

## Introduction

The internet has given people easy access to the outside world over the past few decades. Teenagers today have the knowledge and skill to manipulate technology. This may occasionally lead them to bully or hurt other people through technology (Usher 2010, 113). One such consequence is cyberbullying, which teenagers frequently use to harm other teenagers (Guidance Report of Welsh Government, U.K. 2011, 11; Burton 2013, 136).

The rapid growth of computer technology has introduced children to new forms of bullying besides the traditional ones (Kowalski and Limber 2007, S22). It is challenging to define cyberbullying in a way that is relevant universally. Cyberbullying is defined as "when another child, preteen, or teen uses the internet, interactive or digital technologies, or mobile phones to torment, threaten, harass, humiliate, embarrass, or otherwise target a child, preteen, or teen." It must involve minors on both sides, or at least the result of a minor provoking and agitating another minor against themselves (Aftab 2000, 28; Coyne 2015, 147). Therefore, "both the bully and the victim have to be minors for it to be considered "cyberbullying (Burton 2013, 135).

Many studies have been conducted throughout the world to examine the involvement of adolescents in cyberbullying. The circumstances are ideal for bullying to occur at this phase of life because the majority of teenagers are trying to develop their identity and personality and have begun to interact with the outside world (Shariff and Hoff 2007, 77-78). Disclosing private information, engaging in inappropriate online behaviour, and communicating with strangers increase the risk of cyberbullying or other kinds of online harassment (Sengupta and Chaudhuri 2010, 284-285). They are in a virtual world with few rules and no adult supervision, and this increases the likelihood of them being victims of cyberbullying, which can be even more fatal (Shariff & Hoff 2007, 84).

Cyberbullying can take a variety of forms, such as derogatory, threatening, or sexually explicit messages sent through email, instant messaging, or comments in chat rooms. By obtaining personal or logging information from an email account or social networking account, cyber stalkers can even impersonate the identity of their victims online (Marcum, Higgins, and Ricketts 2014, 48). Teenagers may also mask their identity and pretend to be someone else (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004, 320–322).

Certain characteristics and traits, like the difficulty of escaping or the potential for embarrassing images or videos to be shared with a large number of people, occasionally make it even more damaging than traditional

bullying, especially on social networking sites (McQuade, Colt, and Mayer 2009, 45–47). It is much easier to be cruel and malicious with this form of harassment (Patchin and Hinduja 2010, 615). It sometimes turns into a weapon of rage and retaliation. Most of the time, adolescents lack the mental strength to ignore or avoid the actions of bullies. They experience sadness, hopelessness, and self-doubt. Feelings of helplessness and frustration can turn into bitterness and rage. Sometimes, the psychological effects of cyberbullying on social networking sites are so profound that teenagers may consider injuring themselves or other people. The sense of no escape is making them contemplate, attempt, or actually commit suicide. (Shapiro and Margolin 2004, 9). Hence, paving the way for them to become delinquent juveniles and criminal adults in the future. Around the world, countless instances of suicides related to cyberbullying have been observed and documented (High 2007, 23).

Cyberbullying on social networking sites is also becoming a matter of great concern for urban societies. In India, the rural and urban communities differ in many respects related to this problem (Blaya, Kaur and Sandhu, 2018). Its nature and dynamics are appearing in a more complicated manner in the complex cultural background of a cosmopolitan city like Kolkata. The sole purpose of this study is directed towards safeguarding the teenagers from harassment and trauma associated with this online bullying. Hence, study revolves around the following objectives-

- To explore the perception of teenagers about asking for help in future on being victimized of cyberbullying on social networking sites
- To depict the perception of the teenagers regarding the safety measures provided by the social networking sites against cyberbullying

### **Area identity**

Kolkata is the capital of West Bengal, India. It is situated on the eastern bank of the Hooghly and stretches in an east-west direction. Formerly, it was the capital of the British Empire in India until 1911. It is the largest metropolitan city in east and north-eastern India, with a very large metropolitan area. All the land-locked states of east and north-east India are economically dependent on Kolkata for business, trade, and commerce. This economic identity, along with local and regional history, has given Kolkata a distinct socio-economic and cultural background.

With a total area of 184 square kilometres, Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) administers the city of Kolkata. Its metropolitan region, or urban agglomeration, extends beyond the jurisdiction of KMC and is popularly known as the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA). At the local level, KMC comprises 15 boroughs, which together encompass 144 wards. The entire population of KMC is 4,496,694 as per the 2011 Census of India, with 2,356,766 males and 2,139,928 females, respectively. It has a very high population density of 24,306 persons/km<sup>2</sup>. The sex ratio is 908, while the child sex ratio shows a slightly better figure of 933. KMC is the 2nd most literate district of the state, and the total literacy of Kolkata is 86.31 per cent. According to the 2011 Census Report, the religious composition of KMC shows a heterogeneous structure. Hindus make up 76.51 per cent of the population, followed by Muslims (20.60 per cent), Christians (0.88 per cent), and Jains (0.47 per cent). The remaining 0.45 per cent is composed of Buddhists, Sikhs, and members of other faiths.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Participants**

Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, is a cosmopolitan port city and capital with a sizable Muslim population, as well as a significant Hindu population that includes both native-born and immigrant Hindus from nearby regions, as well as Chinese, Goans, Syrian Christians, Parsis, and Jews. Based on its socio-cultural mosaic, KMC can be spatially divided into several zones: the areas of highly educated, service-oriented middle class people in Behala, Tollygaunge, and Shayambazar; the areas of minority people in Ekbalpur, Mominpur, Park Circus, and Tangra; and the areas with immigrant communities from other states, such as Posta and Bara Baza. Schools from each of middle class neighbourhoods, minority dominated neighbourhoods, posh neighbourhoods and immigrant dominated neighbourhoods were selected for the survey. Purposive sampling had been used to collect samples from the aforementioned neighbourhood schools to reveal the objective reality. A total number of 578 boys and 621 girls had been surveyed. The majority of the surveyed students were in grades nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. Students of lower grades were not surveyed because it was found during the pilot survey that using the internet for communication and having an email address or social media profiles is extremely uncommon below these grades, at least among teens in Kolkata. The observation holds true, at least for the teens in Kolkata.



## **Instrument and Measure**

A questionnaire on cyberbullying had been developed by the authors based on the review of previous researches and a pilot survey. There were twenty-two multiple-choice questions in the questionnaire; the majority of questions were closed types to minimise error. Before carrying out the survey, the language of each question had been adjusted according to the reading competence of high school pupils. The majority of the questions were aimed at discouraging the involvement and experiences of teenagers with cyberbullying. The questionnaire was divided into categories like the background of the teen, the type and extent of any online bullying they had experienced, and their perception about social networks.

During the survey some questions were asked to the all teenagers regarding their perception about the security features provided by the social networks. The same questions were asked to all the four groups of bully, victim, bully-victim and not involved teens. Main focus was given on four questions. The first question was that if they become victim of cyberbullying in future will they approach anyone for help and if they approach then who it will be The second one is whether the privacy policy provided by the social networks are inadequate or not. The third question was whether these inadequate policies are the reason behind cyberbullying on social networks or not. Finally, they were asked about their perception regarding the relation between disclosing more information on social network and getting bullies online. To eliminate error as the questionnaire was adopted to the intelligence level of teenagers between the age group of 13 years to 19 years, the answers were collected as five point Likert scale response. The five options were strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree and strongly disagree.

The survey was conducted during lunch breaks or library hours. It took the participants, on average, fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire. The students received a brief explanation and guidance before the survey to help them understand and complete the questionnaire. Most responses pertaining to online bullying and internet use have been measured using a five-point Likert scale structure.

## **Result and Discussion**

One of the main problems related to preventing and developing effective mechanisms against cyberbullying on social networking sites is the lack of sharing about the incident by the victims. The young victim teens either had not shared about being victimised or are not open to the idea of sharing the incident and seeking help if

they become victims in the future. Reporting about such incidents is an important instrument in combating the vice of cyberbullying. On being reported of the incident, help can be provided not only to the victim but also to the offending bully. Both the victim and the bully are teenagers in the case of cyberbullying and they both need mental, emotional, psychological as well as institutional help to come out of this dangerous practice. Besides reporting on being bullied, awareness related to sharing and procuring help if the teenagers are bullied online in the future is also very important. It is an essential part of combating cyberbullying and cyberbullying on social networking sites.

During the study, teenagers were approached to share their opinions regarding it, i.e., if they become victims of cyberbullying in the future, will they approach anyone for help, and if they do, then who will it be? This question was asked to all the teenagers during the survey and it included all four categories of teens, i.e., bully, victim, bully-victim and not involved teens. The answer can also shed light on the level of awareness that teenagers have regarding this problem.

Only 4.85 per cent of the surveyed teens said that they would not share it with others and showed resistance. The reason being the fear of getting judged by others, victim shaming and also, in some instances, getting misunderstood and being punished. One of the respondents perceived, 'everyone will ask why I put myself in such a situation. I am responsible for the whole incident and my suffering. Restrictions might be imposed on me, especially regarding the use of the internet and my phone. Instead of help, it might lead to punishment.'

The brighter side of the story is that a good number of teenagers answered in favour of sharing about the harassment if they get bullied on social networks in the future. They are aware and they can understand the need to inform and ask for help. But this awareness does not ensure reporting and sharing. It is obvious that even if they feel or think that they should share such an incident in the future, actually sharing it in reality is two different things. Even the most aware teens might not have the courage or might feel scared or shy or shameful about actually sharing the bullying incident. Still, the optimistic part of the result of the survey is that many teens (95.15 per cent) understand that sharing it can help them.

In this case, friends both at school (51.51 per cent) and outside (30.30 per cent) are preferred by them as a real confidant to share such incidents. Even siblings (32.3 per cent) also appear to them as safe and reliable people to share. Guardians, along with parents, are also reliable places to share such things for many of the teenagers.

The fact that this time the result also included teens who are not involved might be the reason for increasing faith and confidence in parents.

The concerning fact is that the teenagers are not showing much confidence to share their problems with teachers. They are not considering teachers as a secure place to share their concerns, if they are bullied online in the future. They are skeptical about the role of teachers in providing help and also scared that it might lead to future negative consequences. The school administration and authority might get involved and they can face punishment and other disciplinary related consequences from it. They also have the fear that if they share it with their teacher, they might inform their parents, which they want to avoid. But if they share it with friends, chances are that their secret will remain safe. A victim respondent said, 'I was not able to sing properly. The music teacher asked me what was bothering me. I shared the cyberbullying I was facing. She called my mother and told her everything. My mother got furious and deleted my Instagram and Facebook profiles. Now she checks my mobile often and always keeps a watch on me. I can't have my own secrets or privacy anymore.'

The social networking sites provide certain security measures to their users. Features like locking profiles, blocking unwanted people, restricting views of a story to a certain group, deleting tags from other people's posted digital materials etc. are some of them. The teenagers are quite aware of these features and use them too. But the survey results indicated that the teenagers really are not that concerned about the security features. Most of them replied that they had no idea about its effectiveness. A very small portion of teenagers agreed (10 per cent agreed and 2 per cent strongly agreed) to the perception that these policies and measures are inadequate and it is causing cyberbullying on these sites and apps. Most of the students seemed confused (69 per cent) or disagreed (14 per cent and 5 per cent) with the idea. Some of the confused teenagers said that they have no idea about it, as they have no proper idea about the security features and policies. They are young and ignorant regarding it.

The perception related to the second question is supported by many teenagers and they agreed that the security features provided by social networks are not providing enough security to their users. The practical hands-on experience they had on these sites might be the reason. They also think more secrecy and privacy should be provided to the users. The ones who disagreed expressed the view that the users should act in a responsible way and should take responsibility for their own safety. Every site and app has some pros and some cons.

The surveyed adolescents were also asked to express their opinion regarding their perception of the risks associated with the information they share on social networks. The question was framed around 'More personal information shared means more chances of being bullied online' and the teens were required to answer whether they agreed or not and to what extent with the help of a five-point Likert scale answer. 36 per cent of them said that they have no idea regarding the relationship or whether the relation is positive or negative. 7 per cent of surveyed teens strongly agreed and 30 per cent of teens agreed that if they should not share more personal information on social networks. According to their perception, they are increasing their vulnerability and are at risk of getting bullied, as the information can be used against them by the bully in the future. But together, they add up to only 37 per cent. On the other hand, 19 per cent and 22 per cent of the surveyed teens said that they strongly disagreed and disagreed, respectively, with this notion. Together, they add up to 41 per cent and so a larger number of teens do not consider that sharing a larger quantity of personal information can put them at risk of cyberbullying on social networking sites. The result clearly indicates that there is a general ignorance about cyber safety among these teenagers. There is a lack of awareness regarding what and how much they should share online regarding their personal affairs, which are in the public domain. This again puts the responsibility on the parents, teachers, school authority and government to make them aware and persuade them to act in a more responsible manner on online platforms and save themselves from cyber predators.

A large quantity of internet access is provided by most parents in the form of internet compatible gadgets and data packages to their children in urban India. The internet is provided mainly for educational purposes. It is also used by children for entertainment and to learn new skills involving digital technology. The responsibility of using this digital exposure in a wise manner also lies with the children also, besides the family and society. The teens are not aware of and lack proper knowledge regarding cyber-ethics, cybercrime, offending behaviours, their prevention and other related issues in this cyber domain.

Before having a profile, a proper understanding of the security policies of the social networking sites is required. The teenagers often open an account out of curiosity and peer pressure. They get more involved in the colourful, attractive features and benefits of these apps and platforms. The safety features provided by the apps as inbuilt features get ignored. Sometimes the teenagers have the knowledge but are reluctant to implement it due to their inexperience regarding the harmful consequences.

Disclosing personal information in the digital world, which is accessed by strangers worldwide, has to be totally avoided by teenagers. Sharing passwords, even with close relatives and friends, should be avoided. Sending or accepting friend requests from unknown people and indulging in chatting with unknown people should be avoided totally. Profiles should be locked for public viewing. But all these basic safety measures are also often ignored many a times. Using only the safety and security features provided by social networks can provide some security from offenders on digital platforms to some extent.

## Conclusion

Numerous news reports have alarmed the world about the growing magnitude of the evils of cyberbullying. But the high dependency of the present world on computers, artificial intelligence and cyber technology is making it compulsory for the young generation to acquire their knowledge. Children and teenagers at a very young age are becoming exposed to the online communication technology, who lack the knowledge about both risky and deviant online behaviour. The involvement of teenagers in cyberbullying can be reduced by spreading awareness, conducting outreach programmes and most importantly by the responsible and supportive behaviours of adults. So there is a need for future research and analysis to determine the ways, methods, trends of online bullying, its effect on teenagers and finally the way of combating this dangerous form of bullying against Indian backdrop.

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## Social Media in Education: An Emerging Platform for Collaborative Learning

Sujan Sarkar and Pranab Barman

### Abstract:

*A person can't know every sphere of life around us through only reading books. But in this changing globalised era, we are living in a click generation. All information of life around us including the past, continuously changing the present and future forecast we can access very easily through a single click on social media and the internet with the help of an electronic device. Presently, the researchers with the help of descriptive research based on the qualitative discussion have tried to portray the ways and benefits of using social media in education. Also elaborated the social media as a collaborative learning platform. Finally, the study stated that social media have versificatrix usable and beneficial in the daily life of educational spheres. It covers dynamic updates and knowledge of everything like politics, discovery, health, science, technology, mathematics, invention, and education*

**Keywords:** Social media, Collaborative learning, Education.

### Introduction:

The use of social media is increasing in infinite ways for the time being. Today, social media platform is taking their place in people's primary needs. From teen ager's children to ager gentle men become social networking site partners attractively. Continuously they are updating their regular lifestyle on social media. People are now celebrating every enjoyable moment on these platforms and also they express their sorrow and perception about another person. Student use of social networking websites and apps is widespread. As part of their daily lives, they spend a significant amount of time on these websites. According to studies, university students use social networking sites more than students of other age groups (Pitler, Hubbell, & Malennoski 2007, 226-237). Therefore, social media is linked to a rise in the inclination of young people to multitask, relying on a digital juggling of everyday obligations (Subrahmanyam and Smahel 2011, 1-25).

Nowadays, we cannot ignore the effects of social media in our lives. Just about every time, we use it to tell what we do, to announce something, share images and stories, communicate with friends, teachers and other social members, to search the recent news, trends of new fashions, health consciousness, educational channels, educational programmes and lectures and so on. The use of the internet and social media are beneficial tools for students which enhance their capability and skills also social media and the internet assist students in their professional life and field of education (Emeka and Nyeche 2016, 1018-1029). From the perspective of teaching and learning, most institutions are using social media as an interesting educational tool for better engagement, understanding, accessibility, and accessibility to all. Students can interact with various people and share information that way as well. This could improve the results of students' learning (Yu et al. 2010, 1494-1503). The potential hazards are too significant when it comes to the numerous accusations of inappropriate online communication. Student's involvement in a personal connection outside of the context of the classroom begs for improper behaviour to start (Gurcan 2015, 965).

#### **Review of related literature:**

Various studies have been done by several researchers and academicians to assess the uses of social media and their impact on the academic performance of students. The use of advanced technology and the internet are the most important factors which can positively and negatively influence on educational performance of students. They have also stated that guardians are worried about those students actually who are spending too much time using Facebook, WhatsApp and other social networking sites rather than studying. Hasnain, studied research to find out the relationship between social media use and academic performance in Pakistani students. The results showed that social media has a contradictory relationship with academic performance. Apart from these, social media platforms can be used to gain knowledge that will help to enhance their educational performance (Hasnain *et al.* 2015). Owusu-Acheaw conducted research to assess and affect the use of social media on the academic performance of Koforidua Polytechnic students in Ghana with a focus on tertiary institutions. Using a self-made questionnaire, the required data have been collected by them. The results showed that the majority of the respondents had smartphones and internet facilities on them. They had also knowledge about various social media sites (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson 2015, 94-101). Raut &



Patil presented how social media impacts the educational sector. The study revealed the various negative and positive influences of social media on education and students' academic life. The study also marked the measures to reduce the negative side of social media on the academic performances of students' such as; lessening the spending time on social network sites; and limiting the social media sites for their access (Raut & Patil 2016, 281-285). Radhe & Anand confirmed that the majority of the respondents spend 30 minutes to 3 hours a day using their smartphones. The study revealed that social media use had affected the academic performance of the students negatively and also showed that there was a direct relationship between using social media networks and academic performance (Radhe & Anand, 2017). Student use of social networking websites and apps is widespread. As part of their daily lives, they spend a significant amount of time on these websites. According to studies, university students use social networking sites more than students of other age groups (Azizi et al. 2019). Otero, Martin-Rodilla & Parapar, presented a platform for application pool techniques integrated with expert judgement to make the heritage of cultural reference collections from social networks in a documented, reproducible, customisable and shareable way. The platform is authenticated by making a reference collection from a social network regarding the most recent attacks on entities of patrimonial encouraged by anti-racist protests (Otero, Martin-Rodilla & Parapar, 2022).

#### **Need and Significance of the study:**

It's a very rare case and counter-example to have a smartphone without internet facility and social media profile. In this modern advanced technological dynamic era, approximately everyone has smart devices and has a minimum degree of knowledge in technology. Social media ordinarily touches our every sphere of life. The educational sector is one of them. A student, teachers, parents, educationists and others have to know the usage, and benefits of using social media in education and also know how social media makes education a collaborative learning platform.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

1. To identify the ways of using social media in education.
2. To highlight the benefits of using social media in education.

3. To discuss social media as a collaborative learning platform.

**Research questions of the study:**

1. What are the ways of using social media in education?
2. What are the benefits of using social media in education?
3. How has social media made a collaborative learning platform?

**Method of the study:**

This study is carried out through descriptive research and qualitative discussion in nature according to the objectives and research questions. The study used multiple theoretical sources of data like journals, theses, research papers, websites, applications, reviews and personal insights of the researchers etc.

**Discussion:**

**Ways of using social media in education:**

- ❖ **Make a WhatsApp group for the entire class:** The popularity of making a group on social media platforms for academic purposes is more relevant and most acceptable widely by the day. Regularly details about taking or absent classes are notified previously through the groups and also the needed documents or notes are provided through these group activities before and after the classes. These platforms are very useful and convenient because students and teachers can instantly connect. Pupils can raise their confusions about academic purposes by sending voice notes and also teachers can give feedback or solutions instantly.
- ❖ **Creating a Facebook page for a class:** Facebook is one of the most useful platforms and it has various activities towards the educational field making the Facebook page specially dedicated for the pupils who belong to a classroom. Instead of putting the students and teachers through the trouble of dealing with conventional classrooms. It can help arrange something new that everyone is familiar with. Teachers and students both can create a Facebook page for the sessions (batch) and advise all the students to

follow it. All the assignments, homework, discussions and updates can be put on the page.

- ❖ **Create your blog:** Blogging is one of the very popular mediums in social media platforms where individuals can share their opinions and thoughts. Blogging is also a great way to educate people on a certain topic in a short time. It is a two-way beneficiary process, where the blogger and subscriber both benefit in their way. Online videos and other academic problem-solving methods and various discussions can be uploaded here. As per the requirements, anyone can watch the session in real-time or zero time.
- ❖ **Create a social media crisis strategy:** It's very difficult to communicate manually to the entire campus during an emergency. Whether it's a tornado, earthquake, fire or any other immediate emergency on campus, determine how institutions will manipulate social media in their communication plan. Through a single click photo or any written updates on social media platforms, immediately everyone (parents, authorities and others) can see and take the right action in an emergency crisis.
- ❖ **Create opportunities for active and passive learning:** As an educator, most of them probably use both active and passive learning. Active learning requires students to engage with the lesson actively. Whatever it may be through debates, challenges and discussions. On the other hand, learners are listening to the lessons and memorising the information from the perspective of passive learning. This may include one-way lectures and note-taking. The effect of using social media is positive on their academic career and students, and teachers got help and getting new ideas of using social media for making education far better and interesting. Social media provides opportunities for both passive and active learning. For example, a teacher could lecture his students on the negative effects of misinformation on Facebook. Then, give them a task to find misinformation and show their fact-checking process. Through this process, learners will learn to investigate the data and provide proof of evidence to support their findings. Active-passive combination learning provides an opportunity for learners to absorb, and memorising the information and then engage them with what they've learned (Zahid, et. al. 2016, 22-29).

- ❖ **Share events and photos:** For better engagement of students, parents, teachers and other academicians with educational institutions, sharing events and photos through social media has created a great opportunity for us. Different photos like programs, achievements, advertisements, progress etc. can attract and engage the students to come and join with institutions. An educational institution can make them standard, excellent and benchmarking position with a little forward step.
- ❖ **Use Twitter as a class message board:** As a part of social media, Twitter can be great as a message board or discussion board for the class. Teachers can make one Twitter handle for each class and it will be reusable for every year, on the other hand, they can create a new Twitter handle each year. Teachers can post reminders for the due date of assignments with a single click on Twitter and also can share motivational quotes and helpful links to regular exercise or practice resources or quizzes.
- ❖ **Use Instagram for photo essays:** In heavy visual classes, students and teachers can use Instagram to present a series of graphics and photos virtually. Instagram permit students to practice online or digital storytelling in many ways. They can create Instagram accounts for specific classes and can delete the accounts over the course if they want.
- ❖ **Reaching the information to all students globally:** Social media is another useful platform, which connects all the pupils to a single shade without any barrier. There is no matter whether it has a different class, caste, race, or socio-economic status, each and everyone has the right to use social media anytime anywhere. Even for the pupils who are from different locations, synchronous and asynchronous media provide the advantage for them to join real-time or zero-time. Through social media, teachers can send and receive various educational information to the students at any time without any problems.

#### **Benefits of using social media:**

- ❖ **Learn new digital literacy skills:** With the help of ICT, social media helps us to know the uses and utilities of new technologies. Social media introduces us to advanced

technologies and provides a way to learn new digital literacy skills. Whenever pupils have some problem coping with new digital technologies or any digital skills, they can get help from social media's various platforms. Recently, the most popular trend has been followed in social media which is the YouTube channel. Nowadays various blogs have been seen on YouTube, like educational, travel, food and many others also. Teachers, students, academicians and others are taking help as per their requirements and it gives economic benefits.

- ❖ **Let students show their personality:** Social media is a feel-free platform for all. Every one of the societies has the right to use social media. They can use social media randomly without any hesitation. Students can freely express themselves on social media's dynamic platform. Regular lifestyle, study technique, innovation, creativity, own thinking, dressing style, communicative approach and others also can be shared with different people globally through social media, which helps them communication skills and develop their personality.
- ❖ **Motivate students and increase class participation:** Social media is an innovative and attractive platform where pupils are interested in joining classes effectively. Social media is not only an entertainment platform but also an educational, social, motivational and communication platform. In online classes through social media, pupils are showing more interest and participation than traditional learning and dynamic motivational quotes, videos motivate them.
- ❖ **Learn different styles of writing:** Reading and writing are the essential part of learning. Handwriting is the most interesting factor which can easily differentiate you from others attract examiners to your notebook and make a unique identity. Innovative writing styles by expert people are creating their channels and making them popular through social media globally, they upload randomly the style of writing which helps them to benefit economically. Students see these videos and practice different writing skills.

- ❖ **Global competency:** In this modern technological era, people to people, institution to institution are connected globally through websites and social media over networks. Each student and institution is busy now making them excellent and benchmark globally. Excellence and achievements are now shared by people and administrators to create a place where they can feel popular and proud. In this way, people are being competent globally.
- ❖ **Improve knowledge retention & understanding:** Using social media, subject content, and materials are visualised to all clearly, concisely and interestingly colourfully and attractively. The way of presentation of information on social media platforms is very transparent and easily accessible to all. Dynamic experts of various fields discuss the topic elaborately for all and give direction to solve the problems effectively. So, learners can develop their retention power, cope up ability and better develop their understanding of the subject matter. Using social media makes it harder for pupils to concentrate on studying and remembering knowledge (Rithika and Sara 2013).
- ❖ **Go beyond text:** Where traditional learning has limited its scope only to reading and memorising textbooks, the learning system of the modern era has expanded its scope widely and is not limited only to textbooks. Social media platforms are providing dynamic opportunities to all in the present scenario. It gives the chance to the presenter text with photos, graphics, videos and others at the same time for understanding by presentation.
- ❖ **Become an online community member:** Physically presenting all the occasions of the society and any other places is not always possible regularly due to a shortage of time and busyness of a variety of activities. Online platforms and social media have been providing a great opportunity for all people to attend the program without any physical barrier. Daily basis share and gathering information from social media is becoming a common matter for all. So, social media positively makes us effective online community members.

### **Social media as a collaborative learning platform:**

Today we cannot ignore the presence of social media in our lives. Almost every time, we use it to announce something, to tell what we do, to see the schedule that our lecturers have made etc. In terms of teaching and learning, most educational institutions use social media to find resources for learning in which technology can play a role in increasing the effective learning process. Social media use can help students attain learning objectives for both general and subject-specific material (Carini et al. 2006; Junco 2012; Junco et al. 2011, 1-32).

This comparator model has the effect of generating a new way of thinking about how perception and action interact: motor activity affects the real sensory feedback (von Holst and Mittelstaedt 1950, 464-476). Apart from the entertainment side, social media directly or indirectly influences on educational environment in diverse ways. Students, teachers, non-teaching staff, and academic persons who are engaged with the educational system all are actively participating in social media platforms in various ways. Continuous sensory overload has an impact on learning and memory, which means that the constant flow of information from nonstop usage of social media might change sensory perception (Rotondi et al. 2017, 17-26).

Collaboration means feeling free of ambience, togetherness and cooperation with each other where people can easily express themselves without any hesitation. Integrating the various factors of social media platforms for virtual collaborative learning can make students feel more natural. Greater inclusivity for students may be possible when social networking is used in education in conjunction with in-person interaction, but instructors must be well-supported in their roles to create effective digital pedagogies (White. Garry 2012, 1). This social media virtual collaborative learning platform helps students who are low confidence or shy to share their ideas in a classroom they can do so on the virtual platform without any fear and thus they are getting a scope to share their knowledge too. It allows pupils to carry their opinions by sharing videos, photographs and articles. Social media helps students improve their performance by giving assignments and encouraging them to assemble the data through virtual or online modes to make assignments more attractive. Students who utilise social media can develop fresh concepts that advance learning.

Through social media platforms, we can explore many things collaboratively. There are some major principles in collaborative mode using social media which are assist, share, exchange, support, success, trust, inspiration and teamwork. It develops our coping power, communication power and collaboration power. Learning that relies on group inquiry, play, and creativity as its guiding principles rather than individualised teaching.

### **Conclusion:**

Nowadays, people have demonstrated the same amount of internet usage, and surprisingly, students have demonstrated more and have consumed a lot of time using social media sites.

Not only the students but also the educators, believe in social media sites because in general social media and the internet are very helpful; they have found what they need in education. Using social media people are aware of dynamic changes of educational, social needs and expectations. Learning systems are beneficial and attractive by saving time, a better understanding of the subjects, quick feedback, content transparency, large audience participation, a wall-free environment, creative space, feel-free platforms, maximum participation of experts and making collaborative and comfortable platforms through the use of social media.

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## **Doboka Riots: An Episode of Unheard Trauma, Violence and Political Melancholy**

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### **Abstract**

*This research Paper analyses the complex dynamics of communal violence in Assam, particularly spotlighting the Doboka region of the Hojai district, in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition by Hindu nationalists. Through extensive interviews with survivors, predominantly of East Bengal origin, the study unveils a harrowing narrative of recurrent strife. For the Bengali Hindus residing in this area, communal turmoil is tragically ingrained in their collective memory. From the pre-independence riots of Noakhali to the violence of Partition and subsequent migration as refugees, and the scars of the 1972 Assam Language movement riots, each chapter of history has etched a melancholic saga into their lives.*

### **Keywords**

Bengali Hindu, Riot, Violence, Trauma, Partition

### **Introduction**

‘Every day, every moment my Leg reminds me about my past, my family and childhood’ with teary eyes Dhiranjan<sup>1</sup> express, who lost his leg, family members, and childhood on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1992 during the Doboka riots when he was just 7 years old. It was 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992; the Hindu Kar Sevaks demolished the 16<sup>th</sup> century Babri Masjid as they believed that it was the birthplace of Lord Rama and Babri Masjid was established by demolishing the Ram temple (Malji, 2021:51). As soon as the demolition of Babri Masjid news spread, riots flare up in many parts of the country with the backing of political forces and organizations. This fierce enmity amongst people was also felt in Assam, especially in the districts of Nagaon and Dhubri, creating a mass exodus of people including women and children. In the Doboka revenue circle area within the Nagaon district, a grave communal conflict resulted in the tragic death of 39 innocent lives (The Telegraph, 2010). In Assam it was the second big hit of the communal riot after the Nellie massacre of 1983, which took place just nine years prior, was among the bloodiest massacres in Assam, with deaths of 1800 according to official estimates (Chopra &

Jha, 2014:11). The communal riots of 1992, however, were distinct in many respects. Both the Muslim and Bengali Hindu populations who are involved migrated from east Pakistan, in contrast to the Nellie massacre in 1983, which was a clash between the Indigenous people and the migrant Muslims over land, resources, and immigration (Hazarika, 1993:59).

The 1992 Doboka riots didn't receive much hype from the media and intellectual circle in Assam, as most of the people recognized it as an 'immigrant vs immigrant' group conflict. It is also undeniable that in Assam the Hindu Bengalis are mostly targeted by the riot groups. In contrast to the Pan-Indian nature of 1992's Ayodhya riots, the Riot in Assam has a different character, it is more related to the history of conflict between two groups i.e Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims rather than mere Hindu-Muslim riots that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The families of the victims, primarily Hindu Bengalis in the region, had experienced a recurrent cycle of violence even before the riots of 1992, which left them in a deplorable state and burdened with traumatic memories.

For the convenience of the readers, this article is divided into four sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the demographic pattern of the Doboka region. The second section deals with the backdrop of the conflict in the Ayodhya. The third section depicts the historical continuum of violence the Bengali Hindus of this area faced and the last section analyses details about the riots including different causes and the trauma with which people do mundane affairs.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with an analysis of secondary sources to comprehensively understand the events and their aftermath.

### **Primary Data Collection**

The primary data were collected through qualitative interviews using the snowball sampling method. Initially, a small group of participants directly affected by the riots were identified and interviewed. These participants then referred other victims, expanding the sample to 27 individuals. This method was particularly suitable for the sensitive nature of the study, as it relied on the trust and networks within the affected community. Each interview was conducted face-to-face, lasted approximately 30-40 minutes, and was recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for in-depth discussions on

personal experiences, perceptions of the events, and the long-term impacts of the riots on their lives. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants' privacy because of the incident's sensitive nature.

### **Secondary Data Collection**

To supplement and contextualize the primary data, a variety of secondary sources were reviewed. These included newspaper articles from the time of the riots, official reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations, and academic research papers that analyzed the socio-political context of the riots.

### **Demographic pattern**

The undivided Nagaon district is home to an expanding population of Muslims, who make up the majority, according to the official 2011 census. Based on the 2011 census, Nagaon district has 2,823,768 people. Of them, 55.36 percent are Muslims, 43.39 percent are Hindus, and the remaining percentages are made up of Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists. Doboka's revenue circle lies under the Jamunamukh constituency. In the Jamunamukh constituency, Muslims made up the majority population. In Doboka town Muslims constitute 74.03 percent compared to 25.64 Percentage of the Hindu population. The nearest town of Doboka is Hojai in Nagaon district is a Hindu-populated area where Hindus constitute 81.11 percent of the population and Muslims constitute 18.28 percent (Census of India, 2011). This also mirrored the general demographic pattern of Assam that characterizes most of the district, with a high migration rate from East Bengal. Agriculture was the economic mainstay of the Doboka region. Most of the population were cultivators, with many being sharecroppers, agricultural, industrial laborers, and weavers.

### **The Backdrop**

Communal tension and hatred plagued India since British rule often involved political forces that turned into Riots across the country. Assam the land of several ethnic groups and religious people lived together, most of the time remained peaceful from the communal riots, especially based on religious lines. The clashes previously in Assam were witnessed mainly based on ethnic, cultural, and linguistic lines rather than religious. The pattern broke after the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. The Ayodhya site where recently Ram temple was built is the

birthplace of Lord Rama. But on this site, a mosque was built by Babur, a Muslim ruler of India and a Mongol conqueror. In 1990, the Bharatiya Janata party under the leadership of L.K. Advani began the Rath Yatra from Somnath mandir to Ayodhya to "take back" the site and rebuild a grand Ram temple. Which eventually led to the destruction of the mosque by Hindu nationalists.

### **The Historical Continuum of Violence**

The history of India's partition in 1947, which led to the creation of Pakistan, remains a deeply etched scar in the collective memory of the subcontinent. Among the many communities that bore the brunt of this partition, Bengali Hindus stand out as one of the adversely affected. Forced exodus, loss of homes, and uncertain futures marked their lives during those tumultuous times. Doboka and the Peripheral areas have a sizeable East Bengal-origin population. But Bengali Hindus, who are the violently affected group there, had already experienced a great deal of hardship and rioting before 1992.

The cycle of violence against these people can traced back to the pre-independent days. As most of the people are Noakhali Bengali, (Those people who migrated from the erstwhile Noakhali district of undivided India) they too witnessed the 1946 Noakhali Genocide. Where the systematic genocide by the Muslim league murdered thousands of Hindus, women were raped, and lakhs of uprooted from their land. Miss Muriel Lester, the British Journalist and member of a relief committee sent to Noakhali, wrote on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1946: "Worst of all was the plight of women. Several of them had to watch their husbands being murdered and then be forcibly converted and married to some of those responsible for their deaths. Those women had a dead look. It was not despair, nothing as active as that. It was blackness.....the eating of beef and declaration of allegiance to Islam has been forced upon many thousands of as the price of their lives" (Ghosh, 2011:941). The aforementioned statement revealed the horrific Carnage of the people that eventually forced them to migrate from their land.

Following India's partition, a second wave of violence against Bengali Hindus erupted, which persisted until the 1971 Bangladesh War. During these times, the bulk number of migrants to the Doboka region came from the part of undivided Assam, Sylhet district, and East Bengal. After the 'Sylhet Referendum' of 1947, the Sylhet district was ceded to East Pakistan. The quest for making Assam an Assamese language majority state through the 'Sylhet Referendum'

forced lakhs of Hindus to uproot their land and migrate to India as refugees. Notably, the Sylhet district had a sizable Hindu population at the time of the referendum, making up nearly 43% of the population (Bhattacharya, 2023:131).

The historical continuum of violence against these people did not cease with the partition and migration to India. In 1972, the community of that area was embroiled in further strife during the language movement over the issue of the medium of instruction. The conflict started in June when Gauhati University's academic council decided to mandate Assamese for instruction and exams in undergraduate courses. The decision was met with opposition from the Bengali organizations (Kalita, 2017:11). This period was characterized by heightened tensions following the assassination of Anil Bora, a leader from the All-Assam Students Union (AASU), which led to the arson as well as looting of the houses of the Bengali Hindus in this area of Doboka revenue circle.

The plight of these people continued with the horrific riot of 1992. The Doboka riots began as a series of murders, attacking as well as destroying the temples, destruction of Hindu properties, and looting. The disturbance sprawled throughout Assam, including Rupohi, Lahorighat, Hojai, Doboka revenue circle in the Nagaon district, and other locations in the Dhubri district. The clashes began in Nagaon town and nearby areas on 7 December and spread to Hojai, Doboka, and peripheral areas. Over 90 people were killed, 10 of them by police firing. As many as 23 temples were also damaged. In the Dhubri district, nine persons were killed and hundreds were rendered homeless (The Telegraph, 2000). The consequent to the cataclysmic events, the collective trauma of this group is innumerable. Krishna Mohan Bhowmik<sup>2</sup>, now at the age of 90 years, witnessed almost all the events of riots in his life from the violence after partition at the hand of the Pakistani government, the attack in the time of the language movement, and the terrific 1992 riots, which took the life of his wife and mother. He recalls his past through these words 'We have everything there (East Pakistan) Bhite bari, Pukhur, Jomi (ancestral house, pond, and land) but then the Gondugul (Riot) started there and forced us to migrate to save our life, but here also we faced the same situation, the experience of a peaceful life has never happened in our life.'<sup>3</sup>

### **Itinerary of Riot**

According to the Primordialist discourse, Hindu-Muslim disputes are inevitable, as both groups are intrinsically disposed to harbor feelings of mutual hatred for one another (Mehmood, 2013). Primordialist narratives suggest that communal hostility between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent dates back to the Mughal Empire, a period in which a Muslim minority ruled over a Hindu majority. Extremist Hindus see Muslims as a malicious "foreign" force that wants to destroy Hinduism. Muslim fundamentalists view Hindus as "Paleet," or uncivilized, and "Kufaar," or non-Muslims who deliberately disobey Islam (Kurginyan, S., & Sood, V., 2011: 101). Most of the Bengalis in Assam migrated from East Pakistan or present-day Bangladesh. The Muslims mainly migrated to this region as peasants by the Britishers and subsequently by the policies of the Muslim League and their alleged role to convert Assam into a Muslim majority province (Mahanta, 2021:61). This migration was also promoted because of the huge population density in the East Pakistan region. But in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the British policy and Muslim league polarization politics made the two religious people Bengali Hindus and Muslims rival each other in the Bengal region. Before independence, the Great Calcutta killing and the Noakhali riots of 1944 took thousands of lives of the Bengali Hindus, leading to mass migration of this oppressed group to the West Bengal region, Tripura, and Assam. This migration process continued till the 1971 Bangladesh war.

The mass exodus of Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan made this group more conscious about their religious identity. Besides, the subsequent oppression they faced in East Pakistan at the hands of Muslims created a historical fear and hatred against each other. After migration this group of Bengali Hindus naturally fond of the Rashtriya swamsevak sangha (RSS) a group closely associated with BJP and also considered as an Anti-muslim organization. The RSS was also most vocal about providing citizenship rights and other basic needs to the Bengali Hindus but opposed providing the same to the Muslim counterparts. This support of Bengali Hindus towards the RSS and BJP somehow made the Muslim community against Bengali Hindus in Assam. Nobody can deny that because of the historical animosity between these two communities in Assam, the Hindu Bengalis are mostly targeted by the riot groups. It is also evident from my field study in the Doboka area that there were also a few ethnic Assamese and tea tribe families living there in 1992 but the rioters didn't attack their houses, the targets were only the Bengali Hindus.<sup>4</sup> Before 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992, On November 30, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) initiated a nationwide strike (Bharat Bandh) to protest against



growing inflation and the rising cost of chemicals. In Hojai town (the closest urban area to Doboka) this general strike morphed into a confrontation with the Muslim community. Supporters of the BJP, predominantly Hindu Bengali, endeavored to enforce the shutdown with particular vehemence against Muslim-owned shops and establishments that resisted closure. This aggressive coercion directed at the Muslim populace's businesses by BJP supporters incited significant resentment towards the Hindu Bengalis within the Muslim community.

Conflicts and outbreaks of violence also relate to land, resources, and broadly to economic factors. Mitra and Ray find that if group incomes are low, increasing group incomes raises violence against that group. An increase in per-capita Muslim expenditures generates a large and significant increase in future religious conflict, in contrast to Hindu expenditures having negative or no effect (Mitra and Ray, 2014:18). During the 1964 mutual land transfer agreement, many Hindu Bengali families migrated to the Doboka and nearby areas, while many Muslim families went to East Pakistan (Samay Prabha, 21 December 1992:3). However, the economic hardships and unemployment that beleaguered those who moved to East Pakistan led to their return to this area, with many seeking to regain the land they left through the transfer process. Given the legal framework, which did not facilitate the reversal of such land transfers. The escalation of tensions in the Ayodhya incident provided a catalyst for these Muslim families to attack the Hindu houses to occupy the land. Furthermore, the Doboka region is characterized by its abundant natural resources and a vibrant ecosystem supported by its forests. Since the time of the Assam movement, the region saw an increase in timber mills, a development that had, paradoxically, fuelled the desire for instability. Owners and individuals mostly Muslims connected with the timber industry have been implicated in perpetuating violence to facilitate their illicit activities, exploiting lawlessness to further their economic interests (Amar Asom, 7 December 2016:5). This dynamic adds a layer of complexity to the conflict, intertwining economic interests with the socio-political fabric of the region. Paul Brass rightly argues that riots are not spontaneous outbreaks of communal hatred but are, in fact, the result of systematic planning and orchestration by political elites or institutionalized groups, where the Criminal groups, the police, and local leadership are closely involved. Brass describes the institutional riot system model as a process that involves the preparation, and activation of participants, the creation and dissemination of triggering events or rumors, and the manipulation of the legal and political response to the violence (Brass, 2011:15). In that

area, violence broke out on 7<sup>th</sup> December late evening, the riot groups demolished the Nearby temples, including the 8th-century-old Hindu temple of lord Shiva, and also killed the priest of the temple. However, on the same day evening, a meeting was organized in the Doboka higher secondary school to form a 'Peace Committee' to oversee the maintenance of peace in the area, but due to the opposition of some people against forming the peace committee, it did not happen. During my field interview, most of the people alleged that the people who oppose the formation of a peace committee are those who are involved in the destruction of temples on the same night. But the worst atrocity was carried out the next day morning, in Doboka town the protestors burnt the effigy of L.K Advani, and at the same time, some rumors were spread that the Hindus were killing the Muslim population. The masjids played an important role in spreading the rumors, the masjid through their sound system appealed to the Muslims to come out from their homes to protect their Muslim brothers and attack the Hindu population. As soon as this was declared violence broke all over Doboka and nearby villages. The worst affected area was the nearest village Kukurbasti of Doboka town. Jushna Bhattacharya<sup>5</sup>, who was just a child then, recalls the Riot's terrifying events. She was just eight or nine years old, attending a local primary school, and as it was December month that day she had her annual exams, after completing exams Bhattacharya returned home. It was at that moment her family heard the news that Bengali Hindus were being targeted by Muslim rioters. Bhattacharya, her family, and forty others quickly sought shelter at the house of a Muslim man named Karim Ali. Despite the danger, Karim Ali's mother bravely misled the mob, denying that any Hindus were hiding in their home. However, the mob eventually found out about the refugees and set the house on fire to flush them out. Faced with a horrifying choice, the trapped group had to decide whether to stay and risk being burned alive or to try and escape through the mob. Bhattacharya decided to make a run for it but was cruelly attacked by the rioters with knives and daggers as she tried to flee through the backyard, sustaining serious injuries to several parts of her body.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Brass rightly pointed out, "The production of communal riots is very often a political one, frequently associated with intense interparty competition and mass political mobilization" (ibid.,32). The Ayodhya riots that spread throughout the country were a successful election strategy of the Bharatiya Janata party to appeal to the Hindu voters. The "Ayodhya Movement" increased polarization and distrust between Hindus and Muslims, thereby increasing the BJP's political power as a Hindu nationalist party. Their 1991 and 1996 election win in Uttar Pradesh

proved “how valuable Hindu-Muslim opposition, antagonism, and violence have been to the fortunes of the BJP (ibid., 8). But the Doboka riots were the opposite unlike the other parts of India where the BJP was allegedly involved in inciting violence, in Doboka the leaders of political parties Indian National Congress and UMF were involved. This was evident in the arrest of the people aftermath of the violence in Doboka, when more than 400 people were arrested after the violence, most of these were workers and leaders of the Indian National Congress. Moreover, people also questioned the role of the MLA of the Jamunamukh constituency Abdul Jalil Ragibi. He was allegedly involved with a few other of his supporters in stopping the police of Doboka police station from going to the riots area (Samay Prabha, 21, December 1992:3). Shabir Bhowmik in his article ‘Ethnicity, ideology and religion: Separatist movements in India’s Northeast’ rightly pointed out that after the 1983 Nellie massacre and the 1985 ‘Assam accord,’ the Muslims also felt betrayed by the Congress party, whom they voted for traditionally. Therefore, in Assam, the Muslims of Bengali origin joined their linguistic Hindu brethren to form the United Minorities Forum (UMF). But soon after the rise of the BJP and their campaign of building Ram Temple in Ayodhya the Hindu Bengalis turned towards the politics of the BJP (Bhaumik, 2004:241). Especially the educated urban Hindus living in Hojai town and Lumding town (the two nearest towns of Doboka) aggressively tilt towards the BJP ideology. In this situation, most Muslim leaders joined the Congress party again. Abdul Jalil Ragvi, the MLA of Jamunamukh constituency from UMF also returned to the Congress party. The younger and more religious elements of UMF formed the Idgah Protection Force (IPF), and some of its supporters were responsible for the attack on the Hindus at Hojai in 1992 (ibid., 241).

## **Conclusion**

This paper is an attempt to look into the different aspects of 1992 communal violence in Assam and the historical causes of the violence rather than limiting it only to Ayodhya’s Babri Masjid destruction. After the riots ‘The Pathak Commission’ was formed by the government to investigate the riot and according to newspaper reports the commission accused many political party leaders as involved in this riot, unfortunately, no one among the big fishes got the punishment so far. Following this conflict in Assam, many Hindu Bengali families also moved out of the state ( Saikia et al.,2020: 409). Many victims' families of the riot still survived with

the traumatic memories. Especially the Bengali Hindus of that area, many generations of whom faced the violent nature of riot and oppression, which made their life pathetic.

#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Name Changed

<sup>2</sup> Name Changed

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the Participant, 25 December, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Field Visit, 24 December, 2023

<sup>5</sup> Name Changed

<sup>6</sup> Interview with the Participant, 27 December, 2023.

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**Memory, Trauma, and Wounded Reality: Tracing Precarity in the Literary Landscapes of  
Abulhawa and Alyan**

**Sunita Lama**

**Abstract**

*1948 marks the historic year of the Nakba, a mass exodus of Palestinians from their homelands, resulting in a large refugee crisis. Ironically, the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were instrumental in dispossession and displacement, creating a racist nation-state that erased Palestinian history. The article examines Alyan & Abulhawa's Salt Houses and Mornings in Jenin within the context of lieux de memoire, providing insight into the contemporary Palestinian precarious existence amidst Israel's biopolitical mechanisms.*

*Keywords: Al-Nakba, Precarity, Palestine, trauma, homo sacer, lieux de memoire.*

**Introduction**

1948 is marked as a historic date in both the Palestinian and Israeli calendars, as the newly established nation-state of Israel, built on the ruins of Palestine, led to a mass exodus of Palestinians from their homelands (Al-Nakba, 'the catastrophe' in Arabic), creating one of the largest refugee crisis of the modern times. Even after 75 years today, 1948 remains a crucial year in 'Palestinian collective memory and the most traumatic event in the history of the Palestinian people' (Masalha 2012, 1). The unfortunate unfolding of the Nakba still haunts the Palestinians as 'that year over 500 villages and towns and a whole country and its people disappeared from international maps and dictionaries' (Masalha 2012, 3). The new masters (Israeli) outrightly denied the existence of the native populations in historic Palestine and legitimized their authority and control over the land with infamous statements like 'There was no such thing as a Palestinian people... it was not as though there was a Palestinian people considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist' (Golda Meir as cited in Masalha 2012, 4-5). The Zionist leaders enthusiastically participated in the systematic erasure of anything Palestinian, bulldozing homes belonging to indigenous people, desecrating their holy shrines, public places, schools, libraries, cities, villages, and graveyards, and resorting to ethnic cleansing of the helpless Palestinians. The Zionists forced the native population to flee from their homes, by using both the tactics of physical might (at gunpoint) and psychological pressure (threats of death, kidnapping, and rape).

The Zionist leaders convinced the Western world that the land selected for the creation of their nation was, ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ and other equally notorious slogans like ‘making the desert bloom’ presented Palestine as barren and devoid of its native populations. The toponymy, geography, material culture, and history of the Palestinian people were all methodically erased by Israel and replaced with newly invented Jewish names—bearing similarities to biblical names—that served to fortify Jewish nationalism. ‘The invention and mobilisation of the ethnocentric paradigm of ‘promised land-chosen people’- and the myth that the Hebrew Bible provides for the Zionists sacrosanct ‘title deed’ to the land of Palestine signed by God-became a key tool in Zionist settler-colonial and ethnic cleansing policies in Palestine’ (Masalha 2012, 3).

The state-orchestrated terrorism led to the depopulation and de-Arabisation of historic Palestine and sparked the conflict between Arabs and Israelis that persists to this day. The events of 1948 created two kinds of Palestinian population- a) exiles, those who were forced to seek asylum elsewhere, and b) internal refugees, henceforth identified as Israeli-Arabs, who became second-class citizens in the newly-created country of Israel. It is noteworthy, that one of the advocates of Palestinian rights, Edward Said preferred to use the term *al-Shatat* over *diaspora* for the word ‘diaspora does not adequately account for the Palestinian experience, since many Palestinians are precisely not ‘scattered’, living as they do in their Israeli-occupied homeland’ and also because of the strong sense of Jewish ownership over the term diaspora (Williams 2009, 83-84). Ironically, Jews, the worst victims of the holocaust became instrumental in the death, dispossession, and displacement of the indigenous population and created a blatantly racist nation-state of Israel that treated Palestinians as “less than human, as disposable, expendable and ‘transferable’” (Masalha 2012, 15). Foucault argues that ‘the modern State can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism...’ and ‘since the improvement of the species – of one race thereof – requires the elimination of the biological threat presented by another race, this shift legitimizes the mobilization of death within a power that manages life: ‘[i]n a normalizing society, race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable’, where ‘killing’ is not limited to direct murder but also includes forms of ‘indirect murder’ such as increased risk of death or even ‘political death’ in the form of expulsion and rejection, for instance’ (Foucault as cited in C. Mills 2018, 17). In *The Question of Palestine* Said blatantly highlights the hypocrisy of the Israeli nation-state which is solely responsible for rendering the Palestinians' precarious existence and the failure of the Western powers to see the injustices meted out to the latter. Said interrogates, ‘We were on the land called Palestine; were our dispossession and our effacement, by which almost a million of us were made to leave Palestine and our society made nonexistent, justified even to save the remnant of European Jews that had survived Nazism? By what moral or political standard are we expected to lay aside our claims to our

national existence, our land, our human rights?’ (Said 1980, xvi-xvii). He blatantly admits that as a Palestinian, ‘we have been unable to interest the West very much in the justice of our cause’ (Said 1980, ix). John Docker draws a similarity in the histories of the Israeli Holocaust/ Shoah and the Palestinian Nakba as both the terms mean ‘the catastrophe’. But in contrast to the emergence of Holocaust Studies in the West, which gave birth to Trauma Studies, the Palestinian Nakba remains unacknowledged in the field of Trauma or Genocide studies in Western academic discourse (Masalha 2012, 11-12). Judith Butler pinpoints, ‘Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death’ (Butler 2004, xv).

For the Palestinians, commemorating 1948 as the year of the Nakba thus becomes a *lieux de memoire* or a place of memory—‘a site of trauma, dispossession, and anger’ (Masalha 2012, 3-4). ‘*Lieu de memoire* arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and authenticate documents... When certain minorities create protected enclaves of memory to be jealously safeguarded, they reveal what is true of all *lieux de memoire*: that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away’ (Nora 1996, 7). Thus, Alyan & Abulhawa's *Salt Houses* and *Mornings in Jenin* are examined within the framework of *lieux de memoire*, providing important insight into the contemporary Palestinian experience in the face of Israel's biopolitical mechanisms that view them as undesirable and unfit, exposing them to higher levels of precarity. Susan Abulhawa is painfully aware that Palestinian history, culture and identity are ‘slowly being erased, replaced with a tidy, uncomplicated myth that denies we ever existed, as if the past few thousand years never happened.’ (Abulhawa 2021). Similarly, Hala Alyan writes about the need for urgency in conveying Arab-American experiences, ‘Because we keep having our stories told in other tongues and in other mouths. People keep telling our stories for us, and they frankly keep getting it wrong...The cost of it is that you end up having entire swaths of people being dehumanized.’ (Alyan 2024). These narratives challenge mainstream politics which have always portrayed the Palestinian problem as nothing but a political nuisance and provide us with a fresh lens to see the precarity of the Palestinian existence couched in unfair world politics. Set in 1948, the two novels tell moving stories of Palestinian families that were uprooted following the Nakba.



### **Mornings in Jenin:**

*Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa account the story of the Abulheja family, who along with hundreds of other Palestinians became victims of an unfair new world order, where they became refugees overnight following the Israeli invasion. The narrative begins with Yehya and Basema having happy lives in their lovely Ein Hod home with their kids Hasan and Darweesh, until the Israeli invasion. In addition to losing their ancestral lands during this ethnic cleansing, their younger son Darweesh gets shot in the back for disobeying Israeli orders leaving him paralyzed for the rest of his life. The entitlement of the new settlers is also reflected in the scene where an Israeli soldier Moses kidnaps Ismael and presents him to his childless wife, leaving Hasam's wife Dalia forever depressed. However, the loss for the family doesn't stop here; in the 1967 Israeli-Arab war, Hasan attains martyrdom, and his eldest son Yousef is taken prisoner. In the Israeli prison house, the arrested prisoners undergo inhuman torture and even when released, they are paraded naked. In this multigenerational narrative, the older generation yearns to go back to their ancestral land, and the younger generation is exposed to hardships and humiliation in the camps under constant Israeli military surveillance. The experiences of characters like Amal, Yousef, Darweesh, Hasan, Yehya, Dalia, and their family members in *Mornings in Jenin* exemplify the precarious existence of Palestinians living under occupation. They are subjected to arbitrary arrests, detention, and violence, with their lives constantly at the mercy of the Israeli military and settlers. Their homes are demolished, their lands confiscated, and their basic rights denied, leaving them in a state of perpetual limbo where their very humanity is called into question and the institutions of power and dominance make it impossible for Palestinians to live normally. This parallels Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* or bare life where individuals are reduced to mere bodies, stripped of all their political power, to be managed and controlled by the sovereign power, and be 'killed with impunity' (Agamben 1998, 72).

Moreover, the concept of *homo sacer* also extends to the Palestinian refugees living in camps, such as the characters in the novel who are reduced to stateless individuals and forced to eke out a meager existence in overcrowded and impoverished conditions. 'They tried to go back the next day, but the guns behind them forbade a return home... Jenin was as far as they could go, and they rested wherever there was space among the flood of refugees converging from other villages... Soon Jordan and Syria gave out a few tents, and a refugee camp sprang up in Jenin, where the villagers of Ein Hod could stand on the hills and look back at their homes to which they could never return' (Abulhawa 2010, 33). Edward Said exposes the double standard attitude of the Zionist mission which was to facilitate the victims of the holocaust with a haven but to realize this mission, they pushed Palestinians to a precarious position, driving them off their

homelands in 1948 and making them ‘unhappy victims of the same movement whose aim had been to end the victimization of Jews by Christian Europe’ (Said 1980, xiii). Since hers is a historical novel, Abulhawa gives special care to the historical dates and incidents and gives human voices to what is otherwise dismissed as war casualties and collateral ramifications of the war; the details of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War given in Chapter Nine is one such example. The scenes where Amal and Huda, barely twelve or thirteen years old, hide with an infant named Aisha in a hole dug inside the kitchen floor to protect themselves from Israeli bombardments, are particularly moving. The precariousness of Palestinian life at the whim of Israeli gunfire is highlighted by the helplessness of the two traumatized children trying to comfort the choleric baby who soon stops crying as shrapnel strikes her in the stomach. ‘Huda, Aisha, and I remained in the hole for what seemed like an eternity of ghostly quiet... Days passed, I think. The baby was inconsolable at times. Huda and I joined her, the two of us sobbing in terror with the child. The baby screamed until she could cry no more. We heard more screams. Beyond the tiled cover, children wailed uncomprehendingly. Women, as helpless as their children, cried and prayed loudly, as if trying to catch God’s attention through the chaos. We heard destruction and blasts of fire. We heard chants. The odor of burning flesh, fermenting garbage, and scorched foliage mixed with the smell of our own excrement in the dust’ (Abulhawa 2010, 59). This incident from the novel offers a critical lens through which to analyse how power operates concerning life and death, shedding light on how violence, exclusion, and marginalization are integral to political structures and practices. In this context, Israel is strategically using their military apparatuses, to regulate, control, and exterminate the lives of these Palestinians. The official UN report highlights Western hypocrisy and UN ineffectiveness, despite the many deaths on the Palestinian side including Amal sacrificing her life to defend her daughter Sara from an Israeli bullet during the Intifada. One can smell the hypocrisy of the Western media in the following lines:

‘They murdered you and buried you in their headlines, Mother.

How do I forgive, Mother? How does Jenin forget? How does one carry this burden? How does one live in a world that turns away from such injustice for so long? Is this what it means to be Palestinian, Mother?’ (Abulhawa 2010, 245).

It is noteworthy that Susan Abulhawa in her portrayal of characters, including those involved in acts of violence, serves to humanize and provide nuanced insight into the complex motivations and experiences of individuals caught amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has resulted in immense suffering and loss on both sides. Through the experiences of characters like Yousef, Ahmed, and other members of the Palestinian resistance, Abulhawa offers a window into the deep-rooted grievances and sense of desperation

that drive some individuals to resort to extreme measures. Yousef blows up the US embassy in Lebanon and soon the Western media denounces him as a terrorist. His actions, when seen out of context, are considered mindless acts of terrorism; yet, when viewed in terms of tragedies his family suffered—his pregnant wife and daughter Falesteen were murdered during the raid on the Shatila camps—we witness a defenceless man blinded by revenge. ‘Forgive me, Amal. It is time they taste a small dose of the heaps they have fed us all our lives—Yousef’ (Abulhawa 2010, 186). By humanizing these characters, Abulhawa does not justify or condone acts of violence but rather seeks to contextualize them within the broader narrative of oppression, dispossession, and resistance. Edward Said draws attention to this duplicity of Western media, which consistently classifies Palestinian retaliation with a label of terrorist activity while remaining silent on Zionist atrocities. ‘As a Palestinian, I resent and deplore the ways in which the whole grisly matter is stripped of all its resonances and its often morally confusing detail, and compressed simply, comfortably, inevitably under the rubric of “Palestinian terror”’ (Said 1980, xii). Unfortunately, Western media and governments fail to recognize these deaths as slaughter, and Butler rightly says, ‘Like “terrorist,” “slaughter” is a word that, within the hegemonic grammar, should be reserved for unjustified acts of violence against First World nations, if I understand the grammar correctly’ (Butler 2004, 13).

### **Salt Houses:**

Alyan’s *Salt Houses* chronicles the path of a multigenerational Palestinian family, charting their history from the Nakba to the diaspora of today. The narrative takes place across several nations, illustrating how dispersed the Palestinian experience is, and delves deeply into the perspectives and inner lives of various characters within the family, offering a nuanced exploration of their struggles, desires, and relationships. For the characters, home is an unstable concept as they move through different geographic locations in their lives. Uprooted from their ancestral property in Jaffa due to Israeli occupation, Salma and her family relocate themselves to Nablus, as a result, Hussam grows heartbroken, catches tuberculosis, and eventually dies of it, ‘More than once he cried into the night, “They took my home, they took my lungs. Kill me, kill me’ (Alyan 2017). Salma’s elder son Mustafa having previously been jailed for protesting against Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem, falls under Imam Bakri’s powerful influence, leading him to believe that he and others like him ought to take up the cause of Palestine. He is consequently caught together with Atef, and gets murdered in the Israeli prison. When Atef is eventually released from prison, he realises the pointlessness of the endeavours and learns how some politically motivated radicals can readily persuade young people of the value of their contributions to the Palestinian cause. These radicals then use the young people as

props for acts of terror, which do not alter the course of Palestinian history but rather fan the flames of prejudice and hatred. Aya, the girl whom Mustafa adores, belongs to the group that has removed shrapnel from their brother's legs and cleaned their sister after being raped, which is exactly why she can see through the radicals' lofty rhetoric and discourages him. “‘Nothing good comes from those sorts of men,’ She said. ‘They lure and lure and if you find yourself next to them, what does it mean? That you’ve got a look in your lip’” (Alyan 2017). Her lines turn prophetic when Mustafa and Atef get arrested.

Atef becomes withdrawn and experiences so intense anguish that he can't even share with his wife about what happened to him when he was incarcerated. Therefore, not even the readers are told what happened to Mustafa or the precise manner in which he was killed. As an alternative, he composes a series of letters in which he describes his mental suffering and the horrifying specifics of his incarceration. When the pills, diet, and vitamins didn't work, it was Dr. Salawiya's recommendation to Atef that turned into a habit of writing letters and hiding them in a book named *A Lifecycle of Plants*, bringing stability to his otherwise conflicted mind. Apart from the cuts, bruises, and wounds on his body, the prison days leave a deep impact on his psyche so much so that it jolts him from his sleep, his heart thudding and mouth dry. ‘SNATCHES OF THE DREAM- electricity, blankets, smoke from a soldier's cigarette- spark in his mind, the images already dissolving, tamed in the quiet bedroom’ (Alyan 2017). The psychological scar is so profound that he leaves Nablus permanently, never mentions Palestine in his conversations, and becomes so disillusioned that years later, when he notices his grandson getting excited about the mosque talks, he grows concerned and tries to dissuade him.

Another particularly significant story from *Salt Houses* is that of Imman Bakri. His family's tragedy serves as a microcosm of the horrors inflicted by Israeli forces against innocent Palestinians. The seaside town of Haifa was formerly home to his family. This family was expelled from their house along with several other Palestinian families and were labelled illegal occupants since they could not present any legal documentation proving their rightful ownership of their homes. The Imam's elder sister was raped at gunpoint, and both the younger brother and father were forced to watch this horrifying display of humiliation. A small boy then, Imman Bakri stood helplessly to witness the catastrophe that befell his family. The line, ‘They’ve even taken away our deaths. They’ve robbed us even of the dignity of death’ (Alyan 2017) highlights the deep-seated trauma, humiliation, and deep-seated anguish that define the life of a Palestinian under occupation. Every character in this book has traumas, be they from experiencing war, losing their native country, or having a difficult time blending in with new cultures. Characters like Alia and Souad are never home in any country they settle in. Alia suffers from a fractured sense of identity due

to the loss of her brother, the loss of her home in Nablus, and the permanent ban from entering Palestine. As a result, characters like Hussam, Salma, the imam's father, and Alia experience sentiments of rootlessness and displacement, while Atef and Imam Bakri deal with survivor's guilt.

Toward the novel's conclusion, Manar reads out the letter written by her grandfather Atef. The letter addressed to Mustafa reads, 'But Mustafa, we still thirst for it. Our mutiny is our remembering' (Alyan 2017). The atrocities of the Israeli nation-state on innocent and unarmed civilians aimed at erasing every trace of Palestinian identity meet with failure as the resistance of the Palestinians lies in not forgetting Palestine. Their revolts are their remembering. 'Our remembering the hundred names of that land... This is what it means to be alive' (Alyan 2017). Hala Alyan highlights the steadfastness of the Palestinians in the following lines in an interview, 'The idea of sumud has become a multifaceted cultural concept among Palestinians: it means steadfastness, a derivative of "arranging" or "saving up", even "adorning". It implies composure braided with rootedness, a posture that might bend but will not break' (Alyan 2024).

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Susan Abulhawa and Hala Alyan provide insightful analyses of how individual trauma, collective memory, and biopolitical power interact within the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These books highlight human fortitude, resistance, and endurance in the face of hardship by providing intimate portraits of specific lives and experiences. They also provide light on the larger political and social dynamics that impact Palestinian life. Overall, these two books provide potent critiques of the dehumanizing effects of military occupation and settler colonialism through the lenses of Agamben's homo sacer. Mahmoud Darwish skilfully draws attention to the indifferent attitude, lukewarm response, and feeble attempts of the influential Western world to solve this ongoing Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

'We travel like everyone else, but we return to nothing...

Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk' (M. Darwish 2003, 11).

The various peace movements and negotiations to end the Israeli-Palestinian crisis have reached a dead end at the moment and seem like empty gestures. Abulhawa opines, 'You know, what's happening to people isn't just this death and dismemberment and hunger. It's a total denigration of their personhood, of their whole society' (Abulhawa 2024). Noam Chomsky writes, 'There are always grounds, everywhere, for seeking a world that is freer and more just, without known limits' (Chomsky, Wainwright and Nir 28 Nov

2018). Thus, the evocative narratives of Alyan and Abulhawa give readers a fresh lens to understand the precarious conditions of Palestinians whose hearts yearn for a country that is unreachable or denied. Ultimately, by humanizing all its characters, including those involved in acts of violence, these narratives encourage readers to confront the humanity of individuals on all sides of the conflict and to consider the deeper structural injustices that underlie the violence and suffering endured by Palestinian communities. Through empathy and understanding, the novels challenge readers to envision a future rooted in peace, justice, and reconciliation.

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**Title: The City and Re-habitation of the Blacks: Re-thinking Urban Space and Identity through the Vision of American Dream in *A Raisin in the Sun* .**

Suraiya Sultana & Soheli Aziz

**Abstract**

*The urban space has been analysed in present times not only from the geographical perspective; there are other forces such as social, cultural, economical, inclining to create different groups among the Americans. American Dream has long been one of the most significant elements of the culture of America. The spirit was being set in them since the independence of America in 1776. This has become part of the hegemonic culture of America causing subservience to other groups in the society. Despite its embracing ideals of individual freedom, self-reliance, hard-work and equal opportunity for all, the so-called Blacks or the African-American people are not treated in the same ways as the white Americans. This creates a difference in the patterns of behaviour of the Blacks. The present paper would claim that economic and cultural factors play significant roles in categorizing people within the cityscape and the black Americans face residential segregation because of this. The paper also examines how a particular urban region is characteristically demarcated by the economic and occupational differentiation of individuals or groups and how does the segregated area shape and influence the personal and public spaces of the inhabited people, especially the behaviour and identity of the protagonist Walter Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959).*

**Keywords:** Urban Space, Residential Segregation, American Dream, Identity.

**Introduction:**

Raymond Williams in his book *Culture and Society* launched on a radical theoretical construction of the entire realm of social meaning – culture as ‘a full way of life’. And he notes that hegemony serves as a sense of reality for the majority of individuals in society, frequently facilitating the dominance of a specific culture. Traditionally, America is known as “the land of opportunity,” a nation where everyone enjoys freedom, prospects of achievement, and high



standards of life. Individual liberty, equal opportunity, and financial goods (or the American ideal) are three pairs of advantages that define American cultural values. However, in order to reap these benefits, persons must possess the following characteristics:

Independence, competitiveness, and diligence. All of these attributes of a person are essential for starting a new life in America, and these experiences progressively lead to the establishment of the key cultural values that still shape American society today. Let us briefly explain them.

- I) Liberty : The European colonisers landed at the Northern part of America for establishing dominions outside the intrusion of the European societies – kings , churches, governments, aristocrats etc. In 1776 , the colonial settlers declared their independence from England and constructed a new nation – the United States of America. In 1787, they drafted the Constitution separating the state and the church and forbidding the titles of nobility. The historical initiatives taken by the first settlers have profound effect on shaping the character of individuals in America.

The Individuals have the privilege to construct identities and lives without any governmental or institutional intervention. Traditionally, this is associated with both psychological and economical independence from their parents as soon as possible.

- II) Equality of opportunity: For the majority of Americans, life involves a contest for success. According to them, people must have opportunities to participate and win the race of life, and no one should win or lose because of his or her socioeconomic status or religion. The well-known American President Abraham Lincoln declared allowance of equal opportunities for all Americans irrespective of class and race. Thus he wanted to establish a society ensuring freedom for all kinds of people in America. But a person has liability to compete with others, although everyone is not successful in their attempts.
- III) Hard Work and Material Wealth: The wealth of natural resources made United States a desirable destination for millions seeking their fortunes. Many of them suffered greatly. Even if some people were unable to reach the economic riches they wished,

they remained hopeful that their children would have the opportunity for a better life. Parents who work hard can provide a better life for their children as they grow up. Each generation has the potential to be slightly more prosperous than their parents. Material prosperity became a value for Americans. Throughout American history, acquiring and sustaining a large material estate has served as a testament to personal ability.

Before analysing *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) from the perspective of the grand American Dream and regarding the social mobility of the characters in the particular urban space of Chicago, some questions arise in our minds:

Does financial amelioration help the black Americans to challenge and pull down the residential seclusion in the urban space? Or, Is there any other way to change people's attitudes towards others within an urban space?

The aforementioned drama was first performed at the Barrymore Theatre, New York, on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1959, to tremendous acclaim. Many commentators have seen Lorraine Hansberry's (1930-1965) writings as prophetic. As an African-American writer, she discusses a variety of subjects, although initially those issues were not very common but later those were realized: colored complexion, inter-generational dispute, class divisions, women empowerment and Afro-Americans' link to their ancestors. In 1959, Hansberry delivered her lecture on "The Negro and His Roots," at a conference of the black writers. She argues that artistic creations are basically social and that African-American writers must engage in the intellectual activities of all men, everywhere. The play is based on a real incident happened with the Hansberry family. She grew up in the Southside of Chicago and her family faced racial segregation. Her father Carl Augustus Hansberry was a crusader against that segregation. Hansberry was attacked by the white people when she was a child.

James Baldwin, a critic, highly appreciates the realistic description of the lives of the colored people in this play. Robert Nemiroff in the Introduction to the play *A Raisin in the Sun* comments, "...one of a handful of great American *A Raisin in the Sun* belongs in the inner circle, along with *Death of a Salesman*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *The Glass Menagerie*".

- Financial Depravity and Cityspace:

The play received compliments not only as a “Negro play” but also for its universal topic by the white press. It means that even if the black characters were replaced with white individuals, the plot would remain relevant. Hansberry believed that nothing is more ubiquitous in the globe than man’s subjugation of man. Although her characters were unmistakably Negro, particularly from Chicago’s South Side, she stated that in order to create the universal, she had to pay attention to the specific.

The Youngers family in the play is originally African , presently living in a slum of the Southside Chicago and they strongly believe the American dream. After the demise of Big Walter , Lena is the matriarch of the Younger family. Big Walter’s son Walter Younger is a chauffeur of a rich white. Ruth, wife of Walter Younger, works in the house of a white American for the financial support of the family. Ruth is a dutiful wife and very much conscious of the present financial status of the family. She is a sensible woman . In the very beginning of the play, we are informed that she is about thirty and pretty but “now it is apparent that life has been little than she expected, and disappointment has already begun to hang in her face. In a few years, before thirty-five even , she will be known among her people as a settled woman” (Raisin, 24). Beneatha, sister of Walter Lee, is reading in a school. The playwright depicts that Walter is a thin young man of thirty five years old and “inclined to quick nervous movements and erratic speech habits – and always in his voice there is a quality of indictment”. Each member of the family cherishes their own dream . But lots of obstacles are there in fulfilling their dreams. Although they are hard-working people, through their little earnings it is difficult to make both ends meet. They desire for the upward social mobility very much . Mama desires to buy a house in the better parts of the city. Because of the poverty, they are obliged to live in the congested room. Walter desires to open a liquor store and run the business prosperously. Beneatha wishes to become a doctor and cure the people of diseases , thereby establishing her own identity from the working class background. In order to put their dreams into effect, they must be industrious and self-reliant. But they are exhausted of dreaming and despairing due to the lack of money. The playwright Lorraine Hansberry

dexterously depicts the disappointment of the Younger family members through the description of the living room and its furnishings:

“Weariness has, infact, won in this room. Everything has been polished, washed, sat on, used, scrubbed too often. All pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room” ( *Raisin* , 24).

The psychological condition is being embodied in the architectural space and minute depiction of the furnitures. The furnitures are exhausted for they have adjusted to the living of many people for a long time. Walter exasperatingly tells Ruth : “You tired, ain’t you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live – this beat-up hole – everything. Ain’t you? So tired – moaning and groaning all the time, but you wouldn’t do nothing to help, would you?” ( *Raisin* ,32 )

In a way, this utterance is a ironically projected upon Walter himself. He complains that his wife does not support him to initiate wine business. Walter takes part with two friends Bobo and Willy. He cannot convince his mother who is a true believer of Christianity and she never allows anything sacrilegious in her home. Walter wants Ruth to persuade the mother to give him the insurance money.

But there is still hope that remains in the minds of the Youngers. This remnant hope is being manifested in the little window of their room :

“The single window that has been provided for these two rooms is located in this kitchen area. The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights its way through this little window” ( *Raisin*, 24).

The members of the Walter family are compelled to get up early in the morning even in a stupor of sleepiness as their bathroom is shared by other families on the same floor. Every morning Ruth forces her son to wake up and then Walter Lee. “It’s after seven thirty I tell you. (She waits again) All right, you just go ahead and lay there and next thing you know Travis be finished and Mr. Johnson’ll be in there and you’ll be fussing and cussing round here like a madman! And be late too!” ( *Raisin* , 25 )

Hansberry portrays the materialistic pursuit of the American dream in the character of Walter Lee and shows how its essence is very much altered in the real life context. As Walter states, “The future, Mama... Just waiting for me – a big, looming blank space – full of nothing...when I’m downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking...turning deals worth millions of dollars...sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me” (*Raisin*, 73). The cultural dominance of the whites is always prevailing in their minds and everyday lives. They barely enjoy the so called opportunity in life accessible for the white people. Walter imagines to lead life like the rich white men, elegant lifestyle, office, cars, conferences, secretaries etc. As he promises his son:

“... In seven years you going to be seventeen years old. And things is going to be very different with us in seven years, Travis...one day when you are seventeen I’ll come home – home from my office downtown somewhere” (*Raisin*, 108).

Walter Younger painstakingly works for many years. He begins to discern the impending insurance check as a means of fulfillment of his dream. On the one hand, Walter is tied with the emotions of the family members. On the other, he is tied up in a knot with the dream. He wants to risk the money by undertaking the liquor business despite the disapproval of his mother. Although it’s not his earning money, he gives free play to his imaginations for the financial upliftment. Thus the insurance money heavily influences the interpersonal relationships within the family.

One of the main themes of the play is the residential migration of the Younger family. From their conversation, it is evident that Walter Lee and his sister are the second generation immigrants in the Chicago city. Their father Big Walter perhaps is the first generation immigrant. The late Big Walter worked throughout his life and made some savings. Now the family lives in a slum of Southside Chicago. The cityspace of Chicago, as Edward Soja notes, is complex, multi-ethnic. Ernest W. Burgess in his essay “The Growth of the City” reveals the proclivity of expansion of the big cities in Europe and America and he terms this process as “the metropolitan area of the city”. He observes that it is very prominent in cases of Chicago. For him, the city entails not only the physically adjacent urban region, but also the convenience of transit, allowing a

businessman to live in a Chicago suburb while working in the loop (the downtown or Central Business District) and his wife to shop at the supermarkets. He depicts the usual processes of an ideal city using a series of concentric rings.

Any town or city grows radially from its central business district, which he refers to as “Loop” (I). This Loop is surrounded by a transitional region used for commercial and light manufacturing. A third area (III) is populated by workers in industries who have left the deteriorating zone (II) but wish to live close to their workplace. Beyond this zone, there is a “residential area” (IV) with high-end apartment buildings or some “restricted” single-family residences. Beyond this residential area is the commuter zone, which includes suburban villages or satellite cities that are 30- to 60-minute drives from the major commercial district. As a result, each inner zone spreads and expands in size.

Burgess’ idealised depiction of cityscape expansion does not apply to Chicago or other metropolises due to factors such as the Chicago River, railroads, and historical reasons for industry location. Additionally, urban expansion involves two complementary processes: concentration and decentralisation. Local and outside transportation tends to congregate in the central business district. Naturally many people daily visits this place for various purposes. Thus any city undergoes centralized decentralization , mentions Burgess . With the physical growth comes the technical services (water services, gas , electric light etc.) of the city. Consequent changes take place in the social organization and personality types .

Individuals are important components of the urban space . Morris Janowitz says in the Introduction to *The City* , “The City is not an artifact or a residual arrangement. On the contrary, the city embodies the real nature of human nature. It is an expression of mankind in general and specifically of the social relations generated by territoriality” . Now the question is how do they become organic part of society? An individual responds to specific social space. Disorganization and organization is working in an equilibrium of social order for achieving the goals towards progress. Cityscape often is arranged in such a way to differentiate and relocate the individuals or groups according to their residence or occupation. Thus in the zone of deterioration , as Burgess points out, we find slums , bad lands , regions of poverty, disease, underworld crimes etc. The

slums are overcrowded with immigrant settlements – the Ghetto. The city is defined by its geographic division among economic and cultural groups.

According to Robert E. Park , physical geography, natural vantages and inconveniences such as transportation services , communication etc. ascertain the general outlines of a specific urban area . However, as the city’s population grows, the gentler affects of compassion, competition, and financial constraints attempt to limit population distribution. Businesses and industries gradually seek favourable places, drawing in a large number of people to them. And the advantageous parts of the city are converted into the highly valued lands from where arise fashionable residences of the rich and the well-offs and the poor people are expelled and they gather in the slum areas associated with deprivation and vice. In this way, different sections of the city more or less assume the traits of the inhabitants , thereby transforming a geographical location into neighborhood. In the social arrangements of urban space, contiguity and neighbourly association are the fundamental basis. Local interests breed local sentiments forming associations among the inhabitants and strengthening their bondings. In the words of Park,

“Personal tastes and convenience, vocational and economic interests, infallibly tend to segregate and thus to classify the populations of great cities. In this way the city acquires an organization and distribution of population which is neither designed nor controlled” ( *The City* , 5 ) .

Often the easy access of transport services divide the attention of the people to different places , thus conducing to ruin the closeness among them . The seclusion of the immigrant and racial colonies , as Robert Park comments, serve to preserve the unity of the local groups.

Urban people, whether living in the better residential areas or in the slums, are often guided by some sentiments and mobility. Mama Lena possesses such a sentiment of buying a house for her grandson. She wants most of the insurance money to be invested for this purpose and the rest of the money for the education of her daughter Beneatha. One’s judgements are often biased relating to people, persons and inanimate things. Besides urban space is in a state of inequilibrium , imbued with destruction and reconstitution processes. It is said that metropolis is a money-dominated space where most people are rational minded. Money is such a thing by which

sentiments are displaced by interests. People want to gain money for achieving some purposes. Extension of the money economy serves to depersonalize human relations. Walter is thus betrayed by one of his friends.

Apart from these, racial concerns dominate in the big cities. The racial prejudice of the whites is shown by the attitude of Mr. Carl Linder, an agent of the Clybourne Park union. He visits the Youngers to buy their new house by paying money. He informs them that the Negro families are happier with their own communities and they should not move to the Clybourne park for threatening the peace of the white middle class neighbourhood. Linder talks to Walter, “Well – you see our community is made up of people who’ve worked hard as the dickens for years to build up that little community...But you’ve got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at that moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of a community, when they share a common background” ( *Raisin* , 117) . Critic James Baldwin points out that “Americans suffer from an ignorance that is not only colossal, but sacred”. According to him, the Americans have nurtured a racial prejudice for a long time and the baggage of myth helps to segregate the northern Americans from the southerners . Therefore, whenever the northern Americans hear of the incidents of racial violence, they are either surprised to hear the news as if such things never happen before or they pretend to avoid it as outdated issue. In his Introduction to *A Raisin in the Sun* , Robert Nemiroff cites a very conspicuous instance of this: “In 1975 , when the cast of *Raisin*, the musical, became involved in defense of a family whose home in Queens, New York City, had been fire-bombed , we learned of a 1972 City Commissioner of Human Rights Report, citing “eleven cases in the last eighteen months in which minority-owned homes had been set afire or vandalized, a church had been bombed, and a school bus had been attacked” – in New York City!”

The behaviour of Linder reveals what exactly condemns black people living in a white society. As the coloured people continue to be labelled with the presumption of status inequality, they are regarded as endangering to an area’s domestic status, most whites oppose increasing black concentrations in their communities. In reality, for whites who want to keep their neighbourhood’s



status intact, mutual hostility to black infiltration is frequently the strongest social tie in an otherwise unorganised neighbourhood.

Mama Lena comments that the white Americans form their views about Africans only by watching the movie Tarzan. George Murchison in the play is a cultural assimilationist but belittles his own heritage.

- **Conclusion:**

Hansberry uses an epigraph of the deferred dream from a poem by Langston Hughes . She gives a message through this play that the dreams of the black Americans are not entirely lost. We may state that the Youngers' dream is partially accomplished by the decision of Walter Younger to move into their new house instead of accepting money from the Association. What will happen after their moving is not certain . But Walter attempts to establish his identity as a future guardian of the family through his decision of shifting the residence to a better place. Perhaps it is the love and understanding that is necessary among the family members which keeps them united in the difficult circumstances in life . This is the alternative inarticulated space a person needs for coping with hardship and hindrances in life. Mama confirms that one mistake is not enough to judge a person. Walter assures Mr. Linder, "We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes , and we will try to be good neighbors" ( *Raisin* , 148).

Brian Berry notes that after 1960, the supply of housing available to blacks expanded dramatically, allowing them to improve their living conditions while also driving a huge number of less attractive apartments in the most deprived central-city regions to exit the market. Simultaneously, the dual housing sector has continued to limit blacks' access to the overall housing supply, particularly in suburban areas. On the one hand, filtering processes appear to have been working well (except for the economically afflicted—the aged poor, the socially disadvantaged poor). He affirms,

"On the other hand, subdivision of the housing supply into racially segregated submarkets is as profound' as it ever was. Although racial relationships are improving in other spheres of social and economic life, residential patterns in city and suburban neighbourhoods reflect a continuing white reluctance to share residential space with blacks" (Berry, 29).

Walter loses sixty-five hundred dollars , as Willy betrays his trust ,but he defies the intrusion from the Clybourne Park Association and acts like a Prometheus to promote the general interest of the family. Mobility of metropolitan individuals not only signifies their locomotion from one place to another. It also takes into consideration variety of stimulations to which they respond. Through their thoughts and actions, the Youngers' flexibility is nicely presented by Hansberry. Although they live in the slums , each members are unique in their behaviour. And Hansberry in this play vividly delineates the perils and attractions of social mobility in an urban space.

Frantz Fanon examines the complicated ways in which black identity is produced. He shows white folks who harbour an underlying dread for educated American blacks. The blacks may endeavour to conform to white norms, but the latter keep them in an inferior standing. The black man attempts to replicate the dominant culture by wearing white masks. Such conduct is more common among progressive literate black people. White norms culturally cast them as villains, implying that black people cannot fit into mainstream society's norms. Black people are unconsciously trained to believe that being black implies committing wrongs. Thus, social and cultural barriers are established to distinguish blacks from whites. There are also disrupted connections between American and African blacks. The former neither can completely integrate themselves into prevalent society, nor can they relate to African blacks who feel more deeply connected to their own nation. Therefore, identity of the American blacks is not a secure one.

Hansberry through this play wants to subvert the cultural dominance of the white Americans and their common erroneous beliefs about Africa and she sincerely endeavours to represent the cultural heritage of Africa through the characterization of Asagai. Brown Guillory lauds her creativity for "[revolutionizing] the way Americans ,blacks and whites perceived Africans". Operating in an African-American setting, Asagai shows the destabilised ancestral connections between the Africans and the black Americans. The playwright introduces the character of Asagai to throw away the illusion about the African-Americans. When Asagai expresses his desire of sacrificing his life for the independence of his country, he envisages a progressive, autonomous Africa. He is able to evolve a cultural conduit.

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## Beyond the Realms of Conflict: Representing Poetics of the 'Everyday' in Women's Short Fictions from the Northeast

Suranjana Choudhury

### Abstract:

*A major feature of contemporary world is its engagement with various tropes of the everyday and its associated discourses. It is interesting to record how this field of literary and cultural investigation finds resonances in women's writings. India's northeast has often been defined through a set of stereotypical characteristics and elements, one being the pervasiveness of violence and conflict. However, a host of women writers like Anjum Hasan, Jahnabi Barua and Janice Pariat have substantially used poetics of the everyday as an important theme in their works. This paper proposes to examine how these women writers have explored the paradigm of everyday life studies in their creative corpus and in the process disclosed how gendered conceptions of this area of study offer significant inputs. Drawing upon insights on everyday studies and field of gender discourses, this paper proposes to examine the intersecting trajectories of these tropes in select fictions by women writers from northeastern India.*

Keywords: Northeast, women, everyday, ordinary, short fiction

Northeast India and its diverse discourses:

India's northeast as a geopolitical space has recurrently been defined around a set of specific notions that rely on its representation as a land filled with natural bounty accommodating varied ethnically and linguistically diverse communities with complex histories of migration and exhibiting a vast range of cultural practices on one hand and on the other being constantly afflicted with problems such as insurgency, community conflicts, inadequate development etc. It is relevant to argue here that northeast as a category of representation is not primarily a homogeneous and uniform category for investigation, it involves construction of an immensely layered and plural premise constitutive of conflicting marginalities and historical specificities. While examining the centrality of overlapping and multi-cornered character of violence in the

zone, Bhagat Oinam and Dhiren A. Sadokpam rightly point out that India's northeast has often been qualified by a twin impression of being 'unique' and 'exceptional'. (Oinam and Sadakpam 2018, 5) As a lived space engulfing multiple realities and contesting socio-political and historical processes, northeast posits a compelling framework of scholarly interventions. Tilottama Mishra in her introduction to the compilation of writings from northeast India pertinently argues that this term which is quite often "used as an emotive connotation for the seven states nestled together in one corner of the country, does not actually denote anything more than a geographical term" (Mishra 2011, xxix). She further contends that as "it happens elsewhere in the world, geography is history in many ways" (Mishra 2011, xxix) Keeping in context the peculiar geo-political location of this zone and also the varied contours of its cultural matrix, it becomes imperative to employ this already existing framework of reference to bring in the relevant textures of issues and representations. This is argued in no way to undervalue the set of intrinsic problems involved in using this umbrella term.

A cursory examination of literary and socio-cultural history of the northeast would reveal its rich and rooted tapestry. The corpus of narratives - both written and oral - provides a tenable lens through which it is possible to discuss what has shaped this spectrum of works of literature. It has to be significantly observed that the continuity with the oral tradition is evident in many literary works here, in which the derivation of mode and content is direct and immediate because of which one can often identify in their works the signs and symptoms of textualized orality. Production of various anthologies focussing on anglophone northeast writings can be viewed as remarkable attempts at foregrounding voices from this region and constructing a veritable map of literary representations. A significant number of writers and creative artists have engaged with specific socio-cultural realities of their region to place before us multiple layers of storytelling, identity discourses and representational acts. These creative accounts converse with one another and comment on a host of issues and concerns thereby navigating different literary forms and conventions. Margaret Zama is correct in her analysis of northeast India's literary productions when she observes that these literary works "usher in a different brand of literary repertoire in ways that depict the various communities, their linguistic registers and the worldview they project in an endeavour to preserve their cultural and ethnic

identities.” (Zama 2013, xii) Over the past few years writers here have sought new ways to illustrate and depict emerging realities of the time.

The premise and promise of women’s writings in the northeast:

Women authors and creative artists from the northeast India have used creative expressions as tools to create and affirm their visions of life “as it was and as it could become” (Mitchell and Taylor 2009, 1). Once marginalised, these women writers are now central and essential to Indian literary tradition. As one engages with the cross-currents and continuities of their writings, one becomes increasingly aware of the modes and manners through which they seem to be in sync and connected with each other. In their endeavours to authenticate the experiences of women communities and establish a context for interpreting the traditions of the past and create a sense of place and community, a league of women writers writing from the northeast have played a crucial role in deepening the study of northeast literatures. Their writings reveal in more ways than one how these authors have sought to understand the interior self in connection with society, historically and politically. While negotiating with numerous restricting social circumstances, they have exhibited agency in playing a significant role in the production of regional historiography. Keeping in mind Mary Bryant’s prescriptive norms about writing literature that would be at once intellectual and intense and written honestly and without fear, it can be said that many women authors from the northeast seemed to have embraced this in their literary endeavours.

Most often women’s creative interventions from the northeastern region have been seen as demonstrating imaginative spaces that reiterate certain stereotypical attributes often connected with the conception of this particular region as a conflict zone. It is argued that these fictional narratives offer compelling insights while drawing our attention to frequently ignored challenges surrounding effectiveness and accountability that violence and strife often generate. Current and dominant thesis examining the subject of violence and protracted conflict are conceptualised as gendered lay bare its own lacunas and gaps. While it is true that women and children are adversely affected and violated in terms of gender-selective violence during conflict situations, the dominant version of the narrative has several limitations and

misconceptions. It must be acknowledged that renowned writers like Temsula Ao, Malsawmi Jacob, Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire, Esther Syiem and many more have narrated through their creative interventions far-reaching potency of stories of violence and conflict as an ideological force, something which Lynne Hanley explicates in *Writing War: Fiction, Gender and Memory* where she elaborates how these narratives are “particularly potent in shaping our imagination, indeed our very memory of war.” (Hanley 1991, 4) Recent works of research and scholarship focusing on these writings have also been found immensely useful for exploring the deeply rooted manners in which a “persistent system of gender relationships” (Higonnet et al 1987, 34) informs war and strife and our thinking about them. Drawing upon experiential nuances of conflict-ridden times of Nagaland, Mizoram or Assam, many of these authors have silently portrayed the unclad authenticity of the region’s suffering by recording the perspectives of prevalent people and highlighting the conflicts faced by them. (Choudhury 2021, 19) To read these women writers’ stories of conflict is to “reconceptualize aspects of... war’s political history” and to move the inquiry to a new terrain.” (Scott 1988, 3349) A large number of these narratives have attempted to reinscribe psychic, domestic, and residual elements of trauma, pain and violation so symptomatic of troubled times. Their own subjugated positions as women within a patriarchal, combative culture appear to have effected an ambivalence and concurrently advanced significant literary responses.

Resonances of the ‘everyday’ and the ‘ordinary’ in women’s works:

Catalysed by the cultural and psychological repercussions of insurgency and conflict situations, these prominent authors continue to horrify, fascinate and intrigue us through their gendered retellings. However, through an investigation outside the ubiquity of violence and terror evoked in these narrations, it is possible to detect a different domain of representation. Along with the issue of patriarchal domination and concomitant fractured subjectivities that continuously compel investigative attention, there is also an abiding presence of the subject of the ‘everyday’ and the ‘ordinary’ incorporated through the lens of gendered subjectivity in many of these writings. Focusing on the elements of the everyday is in fact a way of de-familiarizing what otherwise goes unnoticed and also examining what is at stake in not noticing. This involves embracing varied perspectives which would offer significant inputs

regarding our understanding of what constitutes the realms of the unnoticed and unacknowledged in these fictional works. By way of analysis of select short fictions by Jahnavi Barua, Anjum Hasan and Janice Pariat it is possible to arrive at a nuanced understanding of representational aspects of the traits of the everyday. An organised selection of characteristically significant short stories by these women authors when examined through the framework of everyday studies and gender perspectives will foreground other ways of viewing the quotidian in the context of northeast India. It will further help in formulating an effective and distinct critical lens of examination.

Maurice Blanchot provides an interesting note on the conception of the everyday as a field related to critical studies and in what ways it is primarily perceived, “the everyday is never what we see first time, but only see again,” (Blanchot 1987, 14) and also adding, “it belongs to insignificance.” This has also been substantiated by a thinker like Storey who usefully summarises the complications involved in defining the idea of everyday life when he observes that there are “enormous difficulties in trying to define something that is so taken for granted.” (Storey 2014, 122) Without having clear defining boundaries, everyday embraces manifold layers of interpretative registers comprising notions like “banal”, “ordinary”, “mundane”, “repetitive” and similar conceptual fields of examination. Through an interdisciplinary structure constitutive of literature, culture, anthropology, sociology etc, the studies pertaining to everyday life illuminates our understanding of daily life. Michel de Certeau in his seminal work on the everyday discusses the complexities embedded within the task to speak or write about this subject:

“Even if [the investigation of everyday life] is drawn into the oceanic rumble of the ordinary, the task consists not in substituting a representation for the ordinary or covering it up with mere words, but in showing how it introduces itself into our techniques—in the way in which the sea flows back into pockets and crevices in beaches—and how it can reorganize the place from which discourse is produced.” (de Certeau 1988,5)

In the context of discourses on everyday life, it has often been noted that the generic trajectory of study devoted to academic and artistic development of this theoretical discipline continue to



echo a pronounced gender bias. Lorraine Sim working in this field rightly observes that “many of the canonical theories of everyday life, such as those of Henri Lefebvre and Raymond Williams, excluded or undermined the perspectives and experiences of women.” (Sim 2018, 8) However, for the purpose of identifying alternate criticism and discourses of the terrain of everyday, it is crucial to examine other veins of critical and academic disseminations and take note of all possible means of examinations of the everyday by women. With an increased focus on the aesthetics and phenomenology of ordinary experience and on habit, repetition and daily time in women’s lives, this field now provides a separate set of conceptual frameworks for the study of the everyday in connection with the pronouncedly male-authored paradigms that have dominated this area of investigation. Concurrently women writers drawing attention to the significance, import and richness of the quotidian have opened newer avenues to examine the everyday. Their writings alert us to the ways in which components of the everyday gain salience and become important tropes for these women writers. Rita Felski in her critical examination “The Invention of Everyday Life” qualifies the everyday and mentions that its typical time function is repetition, its typical space the home and its typical mode of operation habit. She contests Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau straddling across the two theses and advocating a middle ground between Lefebvre’s analysis of the everyday as alienation (and women as the victims of everyday life) and Certeau’s interpretation of the realm of the everyday as embodying resistance and self-expression. Felski notes in this regard that the association of the everyday with repetition, home, and habit often involves “assumptions about gender and women’s relationship to the modern world”. (Felski 2000, 81)

A significant corpus of women writers comprising names like Jahnavi Barua, Anjum Hasan and Janice Pariat have been selected for analysis in this essay because their oeuvres reveal an engagement with the idea of everyday and ordinary and its representation. In a markedly androcentric qualification of the everyday it is possible to note a different kind of figurations of the everyday and its related dynamics in these women’s writings from the northeast. By focussing on the conceptions of the everyday and their impact on these writers’ personal, aesthetic, and ethical investments in the ordinary and daily, it is useful to locate their shared approaches to the subject of the everyday. This will help in countering theoretical practices that problematizes the ordinary and ignores the different trends in which ordinariness also operates

as a positive value and accomplishment. Through an analysis of Barua's short stories like "The Favourite Child" and "Awakening" and narratives like "Good Housekeeping" or "Yellow Rose" authored by Anjum Hasan and Janice Pariat's stories like "Laitlum" and "19/87" it is possible to acknowledge the unheroic and the overlooked and which are oftentimes associated with domesticity and the habitual. These stories offer alternative ways of thinking about the intersections between the everyday concepts of merit and the ethical in relation to women's experiences.

Through depiction of characters who negotiate between the home and the world, Barua and Hassan represent how these individuals earnestly construct a sense of being at home while mediating between new conceptions of collaborative self and identity. For example, in Barua's story "Awakening", the protagonist Uma after having lost her only son Anuj embraces solitude and her commitment to such a state eventually makes her distanced from people and she discovers how her personal relationships become fraught with tension and a measure of unworkable compromise informs her entire connection with the surrounding world. Her voluntary confinement to home leads her to repeatedly find an ally in silence. Her inability to mingle with the rest propels her to seek the dailiness of silence which rests on the assumption that such everydayness of experience is defined by an attitude which is one of varied indices of ordinary life. As Uma talks about her predicament: "Silence had proved a faithful ally in Jatin's house too: it had curled around her, insulating her from Moni and her mother-in-law's frequent gibes. It became a familiar habit, the silence, convincing her of her solitary nature." (178) Here the element of indeterminacy constituted within the spectrum of the everyday is evocatively explored by the author in its myriad forms. In another story "The Favourite Child", the author captures how the everyday and the ordinary function as an expression of character and offer seminal sites of mediation and exchange between characters. Additionally, moments of care and responsibility as depicted by the connection established by the sisters in the story are frequently connected in Barua's narrative to the quotidian, the habitual. With her attention to the elaboration of small details, the author succeeds in invoking sympathy and emotional gravity emerging through a nuanced reading of the story. Barua's depiction of the moments of closeness shared by the siblings in a small cabin of a nursing home suggests an exploration of the tension created through an interface between the familiar and the remote, the remote being embodied by the hospital room. As Ranu notes in the course of the story:

“A mood, if not of merriment, then of muted gaiety, soon developed in the cramped room. The years fell away as the sisters gathered in a circle and chattered like little girls laughing, sometimes crying, over memories once dim, which they now brought into the light and lovingly uncovered.” (168)

Here it is appropriate to draw the reference of Jane Bennett who perceives the ordinary as a site of enchantment while qualifying it as a space of openness to the “disturbing-captivating elements in everyday experience.” (Bennett 2001, 131)

To locate the extraordinary that lives in the vicinity of the ordinary is a textual element that Barua uses to highlight the remarkable specifics of everyday discourses. Different levels of gendered hierarchy operational within the familial site is also an important dimension that remains embedded within these configurations of everyday dynamics. The variety and complexity of models of the everyday and its association with gender equations is foregrounded in the story which can be illustrated especially in the subsequent phase of the story which records how one of the siblings Junu’s subject position is shown in the light of restrictive and limiting challenges. Her life circumstances detailed in the story take into account issues of diverseness through the lens of everyday life - gender, class, cultural location etc which in turn emphasise the primacy of the question of witnessing and articulating scenes of subjective and social crisis which invariably affects individual lives.

In Janice Pariat’s story “Laitlum”, the narrator’s encounter of the here and now brings into light the remembrance of curfew-emptied roads of Shillong which she witnessed frequently during the days of growing up. Through a layered investment in the account of Shillong as a place of blackout evenings, Pariat chronicles an intersubjective and affective relationship with her native place. This perception of the narrator’s neighbourhood is set in contrast against her parents’ perception of the memories of Shillong they grew up in: “The peaceful little place they’d had grown up in, with its quaint British ways and pretty bungalows, its safe streets and pine-dappled innocence.” (129) Virginia Woolf’s claim in “Modern Fiction” that an authentic depiction of ordinary experience should be the aim of the modern novelist is useful to remember here. Pariat in her attempt to arrest the ordinary components of life around troubled times incorporates an aesthetic of the familiar. While taking into account the familial space as the locus of investigation, Pariat’s narrative attends to the conflicting emotions emerging from the constant structuring of the home alongside the external world. It holds the key to laying

bare the sequences of changes happening and affecting the narrator and capturing the complicated negotiations between everyday life and human condition. Her documentation of the mundane and the ordinary through short descriptive details of the domestic space renders an echo of intimate and pervasive representation.

In many ways, the story also documents the explication of what Gerot Bohme defines as “aesthetic capitalism” (Bohem 2017, 14) which he qualifies as the economic saturation of the domestic sphere following which economic growth becomes possible “only through the enhancement of life, through the production of means for staging oneself, that is, through the production of aesthetic values.” (Bohem 2017, 14) The presence of music cassettes as inseparable entities pervasive in the lives of the family members suggest a productive connection between realism and the everyday.

Anjum Hasan’s stories talk about individuals living their lives and being impacted by the everyday and the ordinary. As an author Hasan has effectively brought forth the remarkable possibilities that the everyday embodies. In an interview with Sumana Roy, Hasan categorically mentions that she has always found inspiration in what one might call daily life and mundane reality. A story like “Yellow Rose” illustrates what Bill Brown in *A Sense of Things* calls an exchange between the physical and material world and human subjects inhabiting that. A compelling connection with and regard for the valency of things and the possible modes through which they act on us is quite evident in Hasan’s exploration of immediate surrounding that engulfs us. Very often characters are seen to be transfixed and stirred by the affective power and uniqueness of the material world, these could be overlooked fragments and unacknowledged remnants of modern life. Her domestic literary space and the objects that populate them induce the task of re-examining and reevaluating the object world. Ben Highmore in his chapter on “Familiar Things” in *Ordinary Lives* observes “how our ordinary lives are lived out in the midst of things” (Highmore 2011, 58) - keepsakes, mementos, furniture, utensils etc. As he further mentions how “things turn towards us: they call to us, sidle up to us. Tools subtly weathered by daily human contact demand to be held and used.” (Highmore 2011,58) Hasan through her portrayal of these everyday aspects has helped in releasing the everyday elements from the numbing impact of patriarchal rhetoric. Her narrative is an attempt to hint that life for most ordinary people consists of the usual. Using Rita Felski’s

notions concerning the loved and the familiar, it becomes interesting to examine how Hasan utilises this discursive formulation in her works. In “Good Housekeeping”, Ayana, the protagonist, tells us about her immediate space and the things and also memories of things that crowd her room and in turn fill out her life. Her everyday life is built on the idea of home, home or the intimate is where one’s world revolves. The domestic world which often houses contradictory emotions and often evoked negatively in feminist and patriarchal discourses is the central site of investigation in Hasan’s stories, both in “Yellow Rose” and “Good Housekeeping”. Ayana’s remembrance of her mother’s temporary bouts of housekeeping and her subsequent phase of mental turmoil is reflective of the functional facet of the everyday as integrating the complex and often disparate elements of one’s experience. As Ayana remembers:

“Tara John would be in her dollhouse mode- the carpets were subjected to whippings, books found their ways back to bookshelves, and mother and daughter sat side by side on the sofa after dinner and watched TV. Then slowly the glow faded, Tara John started weeping and drinking and puking on the carpet again, and the dollhouse slowly caved in.” (21)

It is quite clear here how ordinary objects are invested with different meanings and become a subject of narrative curiosity.

The subject of everyday and its allies like the familiar and the common are central to the host of arguments raised in this article. The intricacies involved in qualifying the poetics of the everyday are notable and to a considerable extent will remain so because “the vividness of the everyday is not simply related to the; it is animated by a will, a struggle to rescue the everyday from conformity.” (Highmore 2002, 174) The stories explored here offer useful gendered accounts of how the experiences of the everyday have brought forth affective and emotional dimensions of identity formations and have induced productions of intriguing discourses of identity and subjectivity.

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## Laughing at Power: Humour and Subversion in Indian Political Animation

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### Abstract

*Political animation in Indian news channels is an emerging trend. Several national and regional news channels broadcast programs based on political animation that address contemporary local and national political issues and debates. This paper focuses on two such programs: So Sorry, a short political animation program on Hindi news channel Aaj Tak and the news channel India Today, and Hirak Rajar Darbare [In the court of King Hirak], a Bengali language political animation program on ABP Ananda, a Bengali news channel. While research has found that entertainment and popular culture play important roles in the political development of the audience, the relationship between animated content, politics and news-based programs has hardly been explored in the Indian context. The paper argues that animated content offers a site to express humour, sarcasm, irony, parody, and satire related to serious political events and personalities, which, to a certain extent, subvert journalism's professional ideology of objectivity. Therefore, political animation resists the traditional practice of delivering impersonal facts and invests in affective expressions, which are not prevalent in most conventional news reports in India. Considering India's uptight political culture, the animated content on Indian politics provides limited space for considering how humour can be accommodated within the field of journalism and politics in a developing country.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Animation, Cartoon, Field Theory, Bourdieu, Political Humour.

### Introduction

The Indian animation industry is an energetic and rapidly growing sector. India's animation and VFX industry was valued at around 114 billion Indian rupees in 2023 and by FY 2031 it is projected to reach a staggering USD 16.60 billion, reflecting a phenomenal growth rate of 37.76 per cent (DBMR 2024).

Factors like increasing internet penetration and a booming telecom sector fuel this upsurge. Animation's roots in India run deep. The very first Indian animated movie using stop-motion techniques, was created by Dadasaheb Phalke in the late 19th century. Pioneering animators like Clair Weeks from Disney Studios further nurtured the industry in the 1950s. However, the present expansion has been driven by the rising demand for domestic content in television and the development of domestic television animation (Prismart 2019). One emerging trend within this landscape is incorporating political animation in news channels, where animated programs address contemporary local and national political issues and debates.

This research paper focuses on two such programs: '*So Sorry*' a short political animation segment on the Hindi news channels *Aaj Tak* and *India Today*, and '*Hirak Rajar Darbare*' (In the court of King Hirak), a Bengali language political animation program on the Bengali news channel *ABP Ananda*. These programs represent a unique intersection of animation, politics, and news media, offering a platform for expressing humour, sarcasm, irony, parody, and satire related to serious political events and personalities. While previous research has explored the roles of entertainment and popular culture in the political development of audiences, the relationship among animated content, politics, and news-based programs has been largely unexplored in the Indian context. This paper intends to fill this gap by exploring how political animation in Indian news media subverts the traditional practice of delivering impersonal facts and invests in affective expressions, which are not prevalent in conventional news reports in India.

### **Scholarly Works on Political Animation**

Political animation as a satirical commentary and critique genre has gained increasing prominence in India's media landscape in recent years. While printed political cartoons have a long-standing tradition in Indian journalism, using animated content to address political issues and events is a relatively new phenomenon. Before moving forward with the discussion on political animation it is important to examine the existing scholarly work on political animation in India, highlighting key themes, theoretical frameworks, and gaps in research.



Very few studies have explored how political animation in India employs humour, satire, and parody to subvert traditional journalistic norms and challenge the notion of objectivity. An article by S. Dinesh and Nagarathinam on political animation explores how news material is animated using features such as characters, music, objects, and symbols. It also discusses how news channels use animated characters as a new medium to convey information to viewers (Dinesh and Nagarathinam 2015). In the broader field of animation in India, Pandyan Kanakasabapathy's research article examines the development of India's animation industry. It observes that the Indian animation sector must still be classified as a subset of the cinema industry or a standalone entity, as India must identify its own place in animation. It refers to animation that has merged with two key fields: the information technology (IT) business and the film industry, where animation has been employed to deliver live-action works in film adaptations and cartoons (Pandyan 2013). Examining animation at a conceptual level, Herhuth, in this essay, shows how political inquiry may inform the study of animation. It begins by analysing animation's marginal status in film and media studies, then expands on its definition and conceptual implications. This extension has philosophical ramifications, which are discussed in this article using the work of Jeff Malpas and Bruno Latour (Herhuth 2016, 6-7). Focusing on online animation, Maike Sarah Reinerth investigates the visual potential of animation in audiovisual political communication. Over the years, animation, particularly animated films, has been used as a form of political propaganda or protest and to address political themes in fiction and documentary. However, with the emergence of "Web 2.0," the overall function of media in political situations has shifted. Changing circumstances for creation, dissemination, and consumption have led to the birth of Internet-specific genres. Inexpensive user-generated material, the ability to bypass intermediaries, worldwide and specific audiences, and the impending call to not only view but act have made web films an effective weapon in political and activist campaigns (Reinerth 2021, 167-169).

A few studies have explored the role of emerging digital platforms and social media sites in disseminating and consuming political cartooning but do not emphasise animation. These works examine how the rise of new media has facilitated the reach and accessibility of these political cartoons, particularly among younger audiences, and the implications for political engagement and public discourse in the European and American contexts.

Evidently, there remains a significant lack of scholarly attention on the role of political animation in evoking emotional responses and affective engagement with political issues. There is hardly any academic work on how the use of allegory, symbolism, and traditional art forms in animation can represent and amplify regional political discourses.

### **Note on Method**

Bourdieu's field theory, which conceptualises social spaces as fields of struggle between different agents and forms of capital, can provide a framework for analysing how political animation operates within the field of journalism and politics, challenging or reinforcing existing power dynamics and forms of symbolic capital. Bourdieu's field theory can be useful as a methodological framework to analyse how political animation operates within the complex dynamics of the fields of journalism and politics in India. This approach allows for an analysis of power relations, struggles for capital, and the positioning of various agents while also considering the broader socio-cultural and economic structures that shape these dynamics. This theoretical framework allows for a nuanced exploration of the struggles, strategies, and negotiations that shape political animation's production, distribution, and reception, eventually contributing to a better understanding of its role in shaping public discourse and political narratives.

### **‘So Sorry’ and ‘Hirak Rajar Darbare’: Politics in Animation**

At the onset, it is necessary to briefly outline the two political animation programs on which the subsequent discussion will focus. ‘*So Sorry*’ and ‘*Hirak Rajar Darbare*’ are two prominent political animation programs in the Indian news media landscape that have gained significant attention for their unique approach to addressing political issues and events.

‘*So Sorry*’ is a short political animation segment on the Hindi news channels Aaj Tak and India Today. The program employs a humorous and satirical tone to comment on current political affairs, often poking fun at political figures and their actions. The animation style is simple yet effective, using caricatures and

exaggerated features to depict politicians and their mannerisms. One of the key strengths of '*So Sorry*' is its ability to tackle complex political issues in a light-hearted and accessible manner. Using humour and satire, the program addresses delicate topics that may be challenging to discuss in traditional news formats. The animated segments often parody political speeches, debates, and events, highlighting the absurdities and contradictions inherent in the political discourse.

'Hirak Rajar Darbare' (In the court of King Hirak), on the other hand, is a Bengali language political animation program that airs on the vernacular news channel ABP Ananda. The program takes a more allegorical approach, depicting political figures and events through the lens of a fictional kingdom ruled by King Hirak and his court. The animation style of 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' is more intricate and detailed, with a unique blend of traditional Bengali art and modern animation techniques. The program draws inspiration from *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980), which translates to "Kingdom of Diamonds" in English, is a Bengali fantasy film directed by the legendary Satyajit Ray. It's the sequel to Ray's earlier film, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* and features the return of the musical duo Goopy and Bagha. The story is set in the kingdom of the Diamond King (Hirak Raja) with a dark secret - the tyrannical Hirak Raja is brainwashing his subjects to subjugate them. Goopy and Bagha use their music to fight against the king and liberate the people. *Hirak Rajar Deshe* blends fantasy, comedy, and political commentary. 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' uses these narratives as a metaphorical framework to comment on contemporary political issues. One of the notable aspects of 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' is its ability to engage with regional and local politics, addressing issues that may not receive as much attention in national news coverage. The program's use of allegory and symbolism allows a deeper exploration of complex topics, encouraging viewers to think critically about the rudimentary ideas and themes.

Both '*So Sorry*' and 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' challenge the traditional norms of journalism by embracing subjective perspectives, humour, and satire. They offer a space for alternative narratives and critiques, subverting the objectivity principle often upheld in traditional news reporting. These programs tap into the audience's emotions and perceptions through their affective expressions and emotional engagement, potentially influencing their attitudes towards political events and figures. The use of animation and humour creates a more accessible and engaging platform for political discourse, particularly in the context of India's often uptight political culture.

However, it is essential to note that while for commentary and critique humour and satire can be powerful tools, there is a risk of oversimplifying complex issues or perpetuating stereotypes (Botha 2014, 9-10). Additionally, the effectiveness of these programs may be influenced by factors such as audience demographics, media literacy levels, and the overall media landscape in India. On the whole, 'So Sorry' and 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' represent an innovative and thought-provoking approach to political journalism in India. By blending animation, humour, and satire, these programs offer a unique perspective on political events and debates, fostering critical thinking and engaging audiences in ways that traditional news formats often fail to achieve (Bhargava and Singhal 2023, 5864).

### **Conceptual Difference Between Political Cartoon and Political Animation**

Political cartoons and political animations, although sharing some similarities in their use of humour and satire to comment on political events and figures, have distinct characteristics and modes of expression, particularly in Indian politics.

Political cartoons have a long-standing tradition in India, with newspapers and magazines regularly featuring cartoons that satirise and critique political happenings. These cartoons typically consist of a single-panel image, often accompanied by a caption or text, that conveys a specific message or commentary on a political issue or personality. Political cartoons rely heavily on visual metaphors, exaggerated caricatures, and symbolic representations to convey their message. The cartoonist's ability to capture the essence of a political event or figure in a single, impactful image is a hallmark of this medium. Cartoons are often characterised by their simplicity and directness, making complex political issues accessible to a broad audience. Humour and satire allow cartoonists to comment on sensitive topics in a way that may be less confrontational or provocative than traditional news reporting. Political cartoons in India often serve as an editorial commentary, reflecting the cartoonist's or publication's political leanings and ideologies. They provide a space for dissent, criticism, and alternative perspectives on political matters (Callus 2010, 12).

On the other hand, political animations such as 'So Sorry' and "Hirak Rajar Darbare" represent a more recent trend in Indian media, where animated segments are incorporated into news programs to address political issues and events. Unlike political cartoons, which convey messages through a single image, political animations can tell a more elaborate story or narrative. They can sequentially depict political events and situations, allowing for greater depth and complexity in their commentary. Political animations combine various elements, such as voice-overs, music, sound effects, and motion graphics, creating a more immersive and multi-sensory experience for the viewer. This multimedia approach can enhance the satirical and humorous aspects of the animation. Programs like 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' often employ allegory and symbolism, using fictional settings and characters to represent real-life political figures and events. This approach allows for a more nuanced and veiled critique while engaging the audience's imagination and interpretation. Political animations, being part of news programs, have the ability to spread to a wider audience, including those who may not actively seek out political cartoons in newspapers or magazines. Additionally, their incorporation into television and digital platforms makes them more accessible and shareable, facilitating wider dissemination and discussion.

While political cartoons and political animations serve as vehicles for humour, satire, and critique in the Indian political landscape, their modes of expression and impact differ. Cartoons rely on the power of a single, impactful image, while animations can tell more elaborate stories and employ diverse multimedia elements (Cohen 2013, 159). However, both mediums contribute to the diversity of political discourse, offering alternative perspectives and fostering critical thinking among audiences.

### **Bourdieu's Field Theory and Political Animation**

Bourdieu's field theory provides a valuable framework for analysing how political animation operates within the fields of journalism and politics in India and how it challenges or reinforces existing power dynamics and forms of symbolic capital.

According to Bourdieu, social spaces, such as the fields of journalism and politics, are structured by power relations and struggles between different agents (individuals or institutions) who possess varying

forms of capital (Hilgers and Mangez 2014, 3-5). These forms of capital can be economic (financial resources), cultural (knowledge, skills, and educational credentials), social (networks and connections), or symbolic (prestige, recognition, and legitimacy).

In the context of political animation in India, we can identify various agents operating within these fields, including news channels, animation production houses, journalists, political figures, and audiences. Each of these agents possesses different forms of capital, which influence their positions and power dynamics within the fields (Benson 2005, 16). News channels and animation production houses hold economic capital, as they have the financial resources to produce and distribute political animation content. They also possess cultural capital in the form of creative skills, technical expertise, and knowledge of the media landscape. Political figures, on the other hand, wield symbolic capital through their positions of power, public recognition, and influence.

Political animation programs like 'So Sorry' and 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' can be viewed as forms of cultural production that operate within these fields, challenging or reinforcing existing power dynamics and forms of symbolic capital. By employing humour, satire, and parody to critique political figures and events, these animations subvert the traditional symbolic capital associated with politicians and their authority. Through exaggerated caricatures, witty dialogues, and satirical narratives, political animation programs strip political figures of their traditional symbolic capital, challenging their perceived legitimacy and exposing their contradictions or shortcomings. This process can be seen as a struggle within the field, where the symbolic capital of political figures is contested and potentially diminished.

Conversely, these animation programs can reinforce the symbolic capital of the news channels and production houses that create them. By presenting alternative narratives and fostering critical discourse, these programs position themselves as credible sources of political commentary and analysis, accumulating symbolic capital in the form of viewer engagement, recognition, and perceived influence. Moreover, political animation can be seen as a form of cultural capital within the field of journalism, as it represents a unique skillset and creative expression that challenges traditional journalistic norms of objectivity and neutrality. News channels and production houses that successfully leverage this cultural capital may gain a competitive advantage and accumulate symbolic capital within the field.

It is important to note that the struggle for symbolic capital within these fields is not isolated from broader socio-political and economic structures (Swartz 2013, 34-36). The production and dissemination of political animation are influenced by factors such as media ownership, advertising revenue, and political interests, which can shape the narratives and perspectives presented in these programs. Additionally, the reception and impact of political animation are shaped by the cultural capital and dispositions of audiences, who may interpret and engage with these programs in diverse ways based on their social backgrounds, educational levels, and political leanings.

Thus, the field theory helps in analysing how political animation operates within the complex dynamics of the fields of journalism and politics in India, challenging or reinforcing existing power relations and forms of symbolic capital.

### **Subverting Journalistic Ideology of Objectivity**

Bourdieu's emphasis on the role of social actors in shaping and contesting power relations suggests that political animation can be a potent tool for social critique and change. By engaging with and challenging the dominant discourse within the journalistic and political fields, political animation has the potential to subvert established ideological structures, such as 'objectivity'. Political animation in Indian news media subverts journalism's professional ideology of objectivity in several ways:

#### *Subjective Perspectives*

Objectivity in journalism is often associated with presenting information in an impartial, unbiased manner without the influence of personal opinions or agendas. However, political animation programs like 'So Sorry' and 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' openly embrace subjectivity and bias. Through the use of humour, satire, and parody, these animations offer a clear editorial stance and commentary on political events and figures. The animators and writers behind these programs do not attempt to maintain a neutral or detached perspective; instead, they intentionally inject their own opinions, criticisms, and ideological leanings into

the narratives they create (Huxley 2006). This subjectivity is a direct challenge to the notion of objective reporting, which traditional journalism strives to uphold.

### *Affective Engagement*

Journalism's pursuit of objectivity often involves suppressing emotional expression and maintaining a neutral, dispassionate tone. However, political animations thrive on evoking emotional responses from their audiences through humour, sarcasm, and satirical depictions of political figures and events. By tapping into emotions like amusement, outrage, or scepticism, these animations encourage affective engagement with political issues, rather than the detached, fact-based approach typically valued in objective journalism. The use of exaggerated caricatures, witty dialogues, and satirical narratives elicits emotional reactions that challenge the notion of dispassionate reporting (Wells 2002, 117).

### *Artistic Liberty and Creative Expression*

By their very nature, political animations rely on artistic license and creative expression. Animators and writers can interpret, exaggerate, and reimagine political events and figures in ways that serve their satirical purposes. This artistic liberty allows for the distortion of reality and the subversion of objective representation. Unlike traditional journalism, which aims to accurately depict events and statements, political animations can take creative liberties to emphasise certain aspects, distort or simplify complex issues, or present alternative narratives that challenge the dominant discourse. This artistic expression directly contradicts the principles of objectivity and factual accuracy that journalism typically upholds.

### *Challenging Neutrality and Advocating Change*

Objectivity in journalism is often associated with neutrality, where reporters are expected to refrain from taking explicit positions or advocating for specific causes or ideologies. However, political animations like 'So Sorry' and 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' often have a clear agenda – to critique, satirise, and advocate for change in the political landscape. Through their humorous and satirical depictions, these animations can actively challenge the status quo, expose contradictions or shortcomings in political discourse, and advocate for alternative perspectives or reforms. This direct engagement with political issues and the promotion of specific viewpoints subverts the notion of neutrality central to journalism's pursuit of objectivity.



By embracing subjectivity, emotional expression, artistic liberty, and advocacy, political animation in Indian news media starkly contrasts the traditional ideals of objective journalism. These animations offer a space for alternative narratives, critical commentary, and affective engagement with political issues, challenging the notion that journalism should remain detached and impartial in its reporting.

### **How Political Animation Invests in Affective Expressions?**

Tapping into the emotional realm and evoking various affective responses from viewers, political animation in Indian news media invests in affective expressions in many ways. One of the primary modes in which political animation engages with affective expressions is humour and satire. These animations often employ exaggerated caricatures, witty dialogues, and satirical depictions of political figures and events, eliciting laughter and amusement from viewers. By tapping into the emotion of humour, these animations create a sense of relatability and shared understanding with the audience, fostering emotional connections (McCrea 2008). Political animations frequently parody and mock political speeches, debates, and actions, amplifying the absurdities and contradictions inherent in the political discourse. This mockery evokes ridicule, disbelief, and outrage among viewers, challenging the traditional reverence and seriousness associated with political figures and events. Programs like 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' often employ symbolism and metaphorical narratives to represent political issues and personalities. These animations use allegories and fictional settings to tap into the audience's imagination and symbolic understanding, evoking emotions like curiosity, intrigue, and contemplation.

Moreover, political animations often directly or indirectly refer to political figures, attributing human characteristics and emotions to them, making them more relatable and accessible to viewers. This personification evokes empathy, familiarity, and emotional connections with the characters, regardless of their political affiliations or ideologies. The use of music and sound effects in political animations can significantly enhance the affective experience for viewers. Upbeat or sombre background music, sound effects that accentuate humorous moments or dramatic events, and the use of voice-overs and character dialogues all contribute to the emotional resonance of these animations. The visual aesthetic of political

animations, including the art style, colour palette, and animation techniques, can evoke various affective responses. Vibrant colours and exaggerated expressions can elicit energy and excitement, while muted tones and subdued movements can convey a sense of contemplation or solemnity.

By investing in these affective expressions, political animations in Indian news media create a more immersive and emotionally engaging viewing experience. Depending on the narrative and themes explored, they tap into the audience's emotions, evoking laughter, outrage, empathy, or contemplation. This emotional engagement challenges the traditional notion of objective and dispassionate news reporting, offering a more visceral and affective way of engaging with political issues and events. By evoking emotions, these animations have the potential to influence viewers' perceptions, attitudes, and even political opinions, as affective responses can shape how individuals process and interpret information. In this way, political animation not only entertains but also can shape political discourse and public sentiment.

### **Accommodating Humour Within the Field of Journalism and Politics in India**

Accommodating humour within the fields of journalism and politics in a developing country like India presents both opportunities and challenges. For commentary, critique, and engaging audiences humour can be a powerful tool but it must be approached carefully and consider the socio-political context.

#### *Challenging Traditional Norms*

In many developing countries, the media and political landscapes are often characterised by traditional norms, formalities, and reverence for authority figures. Emphasising humour in journalism and political discourse can challenge these established norms, providing a refreshing and accessible way to address complex issues. Political animation programs like 'So Sorry' and 'Hirak Rajar Darbare' exemplify this approach, using humour and satire to critique political figures and events in a manner that may be less confrontational or provocative than traditional reporting.

### *Fostering Critical Thinking and Public Discourse*

Humour can be an effective means of fostering critical thinking and stimulating public discourse on political matters. By presenting serious issues humorously and relatable, political animation and satirical journalism can engage audiences who may otherwise feel disconnected from traditional news formats. In developing countries like India, where a substantial measure of the population may have inadequate access to formal education or exposure to diverse perspectives, humour can serve as a gateway to exploring complex political themes and encouraging a more informed and engaged citizenry.

### *Navigating Cultural Sensitivities*

While humour can be a powerful tool, navigating cultural sensitivities and avoiding perpetuating harmful stereotypes or offending specific communities is crucial. In diverse and pluralistic societies, political humour must be crafted with an understanding of the local cultural contexts and an awareness of potentially sensitive topics. Striking the right balance between satirical commentary and respect for different cultural perspectives is a delicate endeavour that can contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced public discourse.

### *Ensuring Editorial Responsibility*

As political humour gains prominence in journalism, it is essential to maintain editorial responsibility and ensure that satire and parody do not oversimplify complex issues or promote misinformation. Reputable news organisations should establish clear guidelines and ethical standards for using humour in their reporting, prioritising accuracy and accountability. Media literacy initiatives can also help audiences distinguish between satirical content and factual reporting, fostering a more discerning and critical approach to consuming humorous political narratives.

## **Conclusion**

The rise of platforms economy and social media has created new avenues for disseminating and consuming humorous political content. This allows journalists, comedians, and political commentators to reach broader audiences and engage with younger demographics who may be more receptive to humorous

and unconventional political discourse. However, addressing the potential risks associated with the swift circulation of misinformation and the spread of harmful or divisive narratives on these platforms is crucial. By embracing humour as a tool for commentary and critique while maintaining editorial responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to fostering constructive public discourse, journalism and politics in developing countries can benefit from the affective power of humour. It can bridge traditional norms and the evolving media landscape, engaging audiences in meaningful ways and promoting a more inclusive democratic process.

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## **Ethnicity and Social Aggregation: Understanding Identity, Culture and Social Movements in a Conceptual Framework**

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### **Abstract**

*It is usually accepted that so far as the study of social movements are concerned it is not possible to identify any one reason as there are wide variations in social circumstances, political determinants and economic imperatives in different socio-cultural conditions. However, it is also true that social mobilization leads to social aggregation, which in turn, may give birth to social movements. Thus, this paper seeks to understand social movements as collective aggregations of interests and demands, taking identity, culture and social movements as influencing factors in the problem.*

**Key words:** Social Movement, Social Aggregation, Identity, Culture, Ethnicity.

### **Introduction:**

In a very thought provoking and stimulating study (Banton, 1994), Michael Banton, a noted social scientist, has categorically stated that the explanation of ethnic and national collectivity is still to be clarified using the same terms used for explaining other social collectivities. To quote him: "In its early stages the study of ethnic and national relations assumed that ethnic and national groups existed as a result of biological evolution and historical circumstance" (Banton, 1994, 1). He further holds: "The social scientist's task was to uncover the social implications of their existence. Today we appreciate that ethnic and national groups are not constant and believe that social scientists have to try and explain the processes by which they are continuously reconstituted" (Banton, 1994, 1).

Thus, attempts have been made by other social scientists that draw evidences from history in order to answer some basic questions relating to the nature and the causes of survival nationalist movements and the exact locations of the ethnic group in such environments. Banton considers this a kind of 'macro theory', which does not take into considerations "micro assumption". With regard to the issues relating to ethnic and national collectivities it is generally believed that an account of 'social aggregation' might be of great relevance which not only highlights the manner in which social aggregations are made but also identifies the factors and forces behind such aggregations. The task will be easier if attempts are made to divide and classify the nature of group formations an the relationship of these groups with the general national formation at a trans-cultural forum.

### **Social Aggregation and Ethnic Presentation**

The first methodological problem that one may encounter in this process is associated with the problem of identifying the forces that operate behind the formation of such group affiliations. One of the ways of looking at the problem is the concept of primordial loyalties or ethnic group loyalties. But even then, there are subtle issues like sub-primordial affinities or loyalties which play, in an invisible way, behind such combination of forces. Banton from an angle that is better be called 'methodological individualism' where the study can be made from the 'human individual' who is 'socialized and optimizing and at the same time belonging to more than one social group' (Banton, 1994, 1).

It is very often seen that an individual, while accepting another individual having same kind of ethnic considerations is guided by the two important socio-psychological factors namely, the nature of personal satisfaction that he is expected to draw from such affiliation and the extent of common concern that may intimately influence him in such a venture. However, this type of identification of considerations may not be sufficient to uncover the whole of social processes as this will be highly individualistic and hence cannot provide a universal theory of its own. Two more issues demand greater attention for such an analysis. These are:

- a) Nature of cooperation that might be needed for such alignment; and
- b) The extent of competition that is involved in such association.

In such circumstances, an individual would look for other 'alternatives' which may provide different ways through which the individual can have either maximum of cooperation or minimum of competition.

In such a complex matrix of social relations that work at the bottom of ethnic and national considerations, the issue of 'assimilation' or 'cultural maintenance' becomes not only relevant but also very important. That is why, it is very often found that individuals belonging to an ethnic group suffer from what is known as "the prisoners dilemma"<sup>1</sup> (Laitin, 1992, 149-166). In the words of Banton, "there is an inter-relation between the capacity of a group to compete collectively in the public sphere, such as taking up a stand regarding language maintenance and their collective organization in the private sphere" (Banton, 1994, 4).

This dichotomy between public and private spheres makes such an analysis more complex as very often it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to draw a line of separation between so-called 'public' and 'private' affairs. That is why it has been observed in a general way that "collective action is often a by-product of an organization for some other purpose" (Mancur, 1965, 132-138). In many cases, it is found that an organization created for a particular purpose, includes within its fold many other issues which may not have any ingredients of either ethnic group loyalties or national relations.

This does not suggest that these group formations on ethnic or national lines are static and have a universal application. Considering the nature of social dynamics, one may conclude that nothing is fixed or static in social relations, be it ethnic or national and because of constant interactions between the social system and the environment within which these relations are formulated and reformulated, newer and newer social configurations are bound to appear. Such conditions will call for changes in the pattern of social relations, which in their turn might have their impact on the pattern of national relations. It may so happen that the generally accepted definitions of relations might be replaced by new set of definitions of relation, class, notion or similar issues may



assume wider coverage. Thus, the relationship between ethnic group formation and national relations is the outcome of number of interactions between many variables. The nature of cooperation and competition among such variables can be seen from the following presentation<sup>2</sup> that has taken into consideration three broad factors involved in this process, viz., politics, economy and culture/ ethnic variables.

**Politics Power expectations / Capabilities :** a) Democracy (self rule)

- b) Opposition to domination
- c) Nation-building (State power vs. Divided Nations)

**Economy Materials interests :** a) Uneven development

- Discrimination and exclusion
- Decrease in class distinctions
- Increase in social hierarchies.

**Culture 'Psychic income' :** a) Search for identity and Status

- b) Is divided into: i) Nation State  
ii) Consociational Democracy
- c) Increased culture Homogeneity
- d) Revival of ethnic cultures post-materialist values

Nevertheless, with the help of this presentation, it becomes easier to find interactive relations between the ethnic variables and other the non-ethnic (political and economic) variables. In multi-ethnic situations, the society in general and state in particular, face a variety of challenges that may come from issues like system of power of oppression and marginalization. These are very often looked upon as forces behind group formation either on national or ethnic considerations when the competition for owner and assertion becomes intense, the expectation from power-holder becomes more, which brings for the issues of expectation and capabilities of the society as well as the state. In such a situation, power holder will look for the adaptation of an alternative accommodating

strategy by accepting ethnic/national pluralism. Clearly, it identifies the spirit of cultural plurality and a political system is planned in such a way as to reflect this notion. This has become almost a common strategy which, in the long run, is expected to generate a greater degree of satisfaction among people of different group loyalties. Hence, the interrelationship between ethnic group affiliations and national relations in a general way can be presented in the following way<sup>3</sup> (Kellas, 1998, 223-226) where three casual relations have been shown:

- **Building-block :** a) Human nature and Political behavior (instinctive behavior)
  - b) Ideas and Ideology
  - c) Cultural, Economic, Social and Political Change
  - d) Consociational Democracy (Accommodative strategy)

**Necessary conditions for :** a) Social bonding

- b) Individual and Group interests
- c) Nationalistic / Ethnic and Cultural conflicts
- d) Political inclusion of different cultural and ethnic unit

**Sufficient conditions for:** a) Ethnicity / Ethnocentrism

- b) Group Conflict (In group/out group)
- c) Social Nationalism (opposition to official nationalism) Ethnic nationalism
- d) Nationalism and Ethnic assertions, Ethnic loyalty and National loyalty.

Hence, above presented these two tabular appearance points to another area, which is appear to be a common ground for further investigation and model building. These areas are better known as areas relating to mobilization and polarization of different group. Here in this process, the prime concern for each group is the achievement/enhancement of interest. This may be achieved in two ways: through cooperation or through conflict (competition). This involves in a different way what is known as “majority-minority syndrome” which suggests that the strategy for adopting either cooperation or conflict will be largely determined by the number of individuals of the group taking part in such a process. In other words, this will call for a specific strategy for a group of people for its survival in the broader social settings. This change in policy adoption may go a long way in

determining the ethnic identity of a particular group. It may so happen that for the purpose of attaining the ultimate good, a group may be ready to compromise with its known specific identity (may for the time being) which is generally described as 'private subversion of a public good'. Though the term 'subversion' is a loaded expression' as someone may call it, it seems to be appropriate in the context of 'approval' or disapproval of a particular strategy out of many alternatives.

To what extent process of group maintenance and dissolution is admissible depends upon two important factors; ends for such action and possible outcome of such actions. In other words, the question of adopting a positive or a negative attitude towards to a particular problem depends largely on the nature and effectiveness of available alternatives (Hachter, 1987). After all identity and human behavior in relation to ethnic group consciousness and national aspirations cannot be one dimensional in character. There might be numerous forces and factors that go a long way in shaping these issues. It has been very correctly observed, "Identity and behavior are partly genetic, but they are also shaped by context and choice. In politics, there are resources within to be used by politicians and their supporters for their own advantage. Human nature provides the necessary conditions for ethnocentric behaviors, but political converts this into the sufficient conditions for nationalism as well understand today" (Kellas, 1998, 26).

The forgoing discussions prove that any study of ethnic and national relations should include within its scope an examination of movements advocating nationalism and ethnic-based politics. A general typological presentation of this issue will reveal a variety of manifestation at different points of history. These phases may be outlined as follows (Greenberg, 1980; Geller, 1983; Alter, 1989; Smith, 1991; Greenfield, 1992): (a) Pre-Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, (b) Classical European Nationalism (c) Unification Movements (d) National Secessions Movements (e) Reform Nationalism (f) Integral Nationalism (g) Colonial Nationalism (h) Anti-colonial Nationalism and (i) Consociationalism and Multi-ethnic politics.

Hence, what is suggested from this study is that an integrated theory of ethnicity and national relations might be helpful in understanding in nature and impact of these very important driving

forces in the present day world where individual and group relations confront many challenges both from outside and within. Such a theory would establish a connection between specific characteristics of human behavior and ethnic affiliations. Ethnicity and relationships between nations show the features of feeling and passion seem to originate from instinctual sources and due to a natural inclination to display fidelity towards 'in-groups' and opposition to 'out groups' (Kellas, 1998). Thus, a model can be built around some key factors which guide and shape the nature of ethnic group behavior and national relations. These factors may be identified as :

- a) Domination and exclusion
- b) Hegemony and consociationalism arrangements
- c) Cultural pluralism
- d) Political accommodation
- e) National identity and national self-determination
- f) Capabilities of nationalists and ethnic movements.

### **Social Movements and the Interactions:**

The foregoing discussion opens up new areas for investigation regarding social movements and their interactions with culture, identity and the process of mobilization. Needless to mention, the nature and manifestations of social movements vary from context to context and that why, same analytical frame may not be suitable for all such cases. However, there are common elements, which have their profound impact on the course of a social movement such as the elements of culture and the issue of identity. In general terms, social movements, as have already been noticed, are designated as issue-oriented citizen protests and varied collectivities demanding social recognition. It has been very correctly observed: "Reflecting the growing diversity of contesting identities since late 1960s, may on the political and cultural left have duly embraced post-class identities and the irreducible differences they exhibit, emergent post-industrial and non-economic

status compositions, socio-cultural struggles for recognition and the multiplicity of post-liberal publics and pluralist democratization of society” (Lee, 2010).

In a general context, social movements have been considered to be something like “collective enterprise” involving sharing of common interest by a group of people. The following observations by Blumer seems to be relevant for the present purpose: “Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises seeking to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in a condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on the one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new system of living. The career of social movement depicts the emergence of a new order of life” (Blumer, 1969, 99). The main aim of social movements is to create “a new order of life” as the members are not satisfied with the existing one. Such dissatisfaction may arise from many issues: social, economic, political, cultural, ethnic and the like. Such collective enterprise can better be explained with the help of collective behavior approach as it –

- (i) Describes the emergence of movement as a reaction to grievances and deprivations, anomic, systemic stress and types of adversity. To the orthodox collective behavior thinker considers that the challenges are a key factor in the creation of protests and movements;
- (ii) Depicts the demonstrations and actions sparked by these challenges as irrational emotional reactions, examples of ‘mob psychology’ or group hysteria;
- (iii) Describe individuals who participate in these ‘mobs’ as isolated people who lack strong integration into society.
- (iv) Groups social movements with other types of ‘collective behavior’ without acknowledging their unique and inherently ‘political’ characteristics. (Crossley, 2002, 11).

It is held that Blumer’s work “is rooted in the perspective of G.H. Mead. Many critics of his work within the social movements literature fail to recognize this and as a consequence, do his work an injustice.” (Crossley, 2002, 17). Therefore, Mead aims to find psychological existence and ability “through physical actions.” (Mead, 1967). While discussing the factor of ‘stimulus-response’ he has held that such actions are the manifestations of ‘identity of purpose’ and not the result of

‘mechanical movement’. He has also held that identical stimuli may evoke different kinds of responses depending upon the contextual variations. Yet, the following observation sums up the entire problem in a broader contextual setting:

“It follows from this that if we want to understand how agents in a particular situation, it is insufficient for us to take an outside perspective upon the ‘objective’ situation (or stimulation) they are in. we must consider the meaning which the situation has for them or as some interactionist put in the way in which they define their situation. And we must view their action as a meaningful and purposive reply to the meaning of that situation, which is an element in an interaction.” (Crossley, 2002, 19). Interestingly, Mead highlights a dual tendency within such behavior: one towards creation and innovation and the other towards conservation and habituation. In the words of Mead: “Our past stays with us in terms of those changes which have resulted from our experience and which are in some sense registered there. The peculiar intelligence of the human form lies in this elaborate control gained through the past. The human animal’s past is constantly present on the faculty with which he acts....” (Mead, 1967, 116).

Actually, he has put emphasis on the concept of interaction among persons, which may sometimes be ‘symbolic’ in nature. The nature of ‘symbolic’ interaction serves the purpose in two ways: firstly, it can cover a wide range of issues and secondly it creates greater opportunities to communicate in a more fruitful way. To Mead, this is the process through an agent can become ‘self-conscious’ which, to him, forms a mechanism of ‘social control’. This point has also been discussed by Blumer to highlight the strength of communication in collectives or group behavior: “The process of controversial discussion forces a certain amount of rational consideration and ... the resulting collective opinion has a rational character. The fact is that contentions have to be defended and justified and opposing contentions criticized and shown to be untenable involves evaluation, weighing and judgement.” (Blumer, 1969, 93)

At this point, Blumer analyses the nature of social movements at their inception that, after some time, take a more concrete form and can act as an expression of organized group-force: “In its beginning, a social movement is amorphous, poorly organized and without form; the collective

behavior is on a primitive level ... and the mechanisms of interaction are the elementary spontaneous mechanisms ....”(Blumer, 1969, 99). He further observes, “As a social movement develops, it takes on the character of a society. It acquires, organization and form, a body of customs and traditions, established leadership, an enduring division of labour, social rules and social values in short, a culture, a social organization and new scheme of life.” (Blumer, 1969, 99).

Blumer’s entire theory can be presented in a model keeping moral, ideology and tactics at the centre-stage and further it appears that Blumer is very much influenced by the impact of conversation in a social aggregation and social mobilization. He comes very close to Gadamer who held: “The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twist and reaching its own conclusion, may be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one known in advance what will come out of a conversation.” (Gadamer, 1989, 183). Nevertheless, placing importance on conversation as a mechanism for social mobilization, Blumer has “offered a highly suggestive account of various elements involved in movement-cultures and the respective functions they serve in organizing the movement and promoting solidarity ... Thus we find a proliferation of works on movement and culture or collective identity.” (Crossley, 2002, 37).

## **Conclusion**

Before drawing a conclusion on the present discussion, it is necessary to reflect upon the important key factors in analyzing the nature and foundation of social aggregation leading to social mobilization. These are - relationship between agency and structure, problems of theory and practice, issues involved in mobilizing the participants for action. It may be noted that in his analysis, Blumer has laid emphasis on agency but he has not taken into the problems of strains that lead to social aggregation and social mobilization. That is why, these appear to be a gap in Blumer’s construction he has identified the role of agents but could not place them in the structures he has referred to.

It has also been noticed that similar problems in analysis occur in Rational Actor Theory (RAT) and also to some extent in Resource Mobilization (RM) and Political Process (PR) approach less. In all these theories and approaches, the issue of 'agents' has not been very clearly explained. These approaches fail to examine in details the nature of multiplicity of complex phenomena of space and functions of other factors, which lead to social aggregation and social movements. It may be mentioned that all these issues have been adequately dealt with in Bourdieu's theory of practice that offers the fundamental components of a simple social practice theory. This may serve as a primary theoretical foundation for any analysis of social movements. It may be mentioned that all these issues have been adequately dealt with in Bourdieu's theory of practice that offers the components necessary for a fundamental theory of social behavior. This may serve as a primary theoretical foundation for any analysis of movements (Bourdieu, 1977).

In relatively new attempt, a new theory under the nomenclature, "Crisis theory of social Movements", seeks to examine very pertinent issues like control, validation and space of public discourse. The concept of public sphere holds significance. in such an analysis as it indicates the nature and boundary of public space without which no such social aggregation and social mobilization can take place. Thus, the entire discussion can be summed up with following manner as developed based on a combination of issues and theories:

**Traditional Formulation :**

- i) Structural suitability
- ii) Strain in the structure
- iii) Expansion and dissemination of universal acceptance

**The New Formulation :**

- i) Political opportunities
- ii) General ignored aspect
- iii) Grievance interpretation, cognitive liberation and insurgent consciousness

It is generally admitted that so far as the study of social movements are concerned, it is not possible to provide any "Grand theory" as there are wide variations in social setting, political determinants



and economic imperatives in different social conditions. However, scholars have agreed on one point that is more or less universal in nature: Social mobilization leads to social aggregation (of interests) which, in turn, may give birth to social movements whatever might be their nature, direction or goal in a specific contextual setting.

### Notes

1. In his work, Laitin has taken language as one of the variables in ethnic group formations and by applying the game theory; he has sought to examine this phenomenon.
2. Largely adopted from James G Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*.
3. The presentation has been suitably modified for the support of the arguments.
4. For a detailed analysis of this aspect, see Michael Hechter's work, *Principles of Group Solidarity*.

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## Temporal Realities and Societal Constructs: Fiction as a Tool for Social Commentary in Stephen King's *11/22/63*

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### Abstract

*Unraveling the intricate tapestry of Stephen King's 2011 novel, 11/22/63, reveals the thematic convergence of fiction and social realities through the innovative lens of time travel. This paper aims to elucidate King's adept fusion of historical fact and fictional narrative, challenging traditional understandings of temporal causality and societal constructs. Through a close examination of the novel's passages, with an emphasis on protagonist Jake Epping's transformative impact on historical events, the analysis delves into the subsequent implications on the present. In 11/22/63, King orchestrates a nuanced dialogue between fiction and social realities. Jake's attempts to alter history through fictional literature highlight narrative discourse's ability to influence collective memory and historical interpretation. The narrative delves into the ethical and socio-cultural complexities of historical revisionism, revealing the delicate balance between humans and established historical paradigms. Prompting reflection on fiction's epistemological impact on social reality construction, 11/22/63 invites exploration of the concept of historical determinism and examination of the ethical implications of narrative-driven alterations to entrenched societal constructs. Ultimately, it emphasizes fictional narratives' potential as powerful tools for incisive social critique.*

**Keywords:** Social realities, temporal causality, historical revisionism, time travel, socio-cultural commentary

## Introduction

Stephen King is a well-known character in modern literature who is praised for his skill in developing complex stories that explore the complexities of society unrest and the human psyche. According to Jackson (2020), his work constantly challenges readers' preconceived notions about truth and imagination, making them reevaluate and reassess their worldview. Through the avant-garde lens of time travel, King begins a thorough investigation of the thematic intersection of fiction and social reality in *11/22/63*. Across the genres of fiction, which include literature, film, and other storytelling techniques, narratives play a crucial role in shaping our conceptions of reality. "What ifs" of history, other pasts and futures, and experimentation with various social and political structures are all made possible by fiction, according to Lisa Zunshine (Zunshine 2016, p. 12). Storytelling has a crucial role in shaping our perception of the world, as Marie-Laure Ryan highlights: "We process experience largely through the lens of story" (Ryan 2007, p. 1). They allow for an intensive investigation of historical periods, speculate about other worlds, and create sympathetic bonds with individuals whose lives differ from our own. These hands-on fiction experiences have a profoundly altering effect on our socio-cognitive perspectives.

King uses the idea of time travel in *11/22/63* as a prism through which to view the powerful impact that story structures have on the formation of historical memory. A sophisticated modern English Professor named Jake Epping, the main character, is sent into 1958 and given the task of stopping John F. Kennedy from being assassinated. Jake highlights the widespread impact that romanticized narratives have on our interpretation matrices of historical events by using historical novels and scientifically supported nonfictional reports while navigating the past. "The past wasn't a dead thing, not some dusty book you could blow the cover off of," Jake muses. It had life. It was breathing. It could give you a nasty bite on the ass (King 2011, p 187). The dynamic and perhaps unexpected aspect of the past is highlighted in this quotation, which makes it difficult to manipulate via made-up stories. The proprietor of the restaurant that acts as a gateway to the past, Al Templeton, is a figure in the story that helps to further explore this conflict. Al says to Jake, "You change the past, you change the future," cautioning him against going back in time. As King puts it, "You don't even know what the hell you're doing." (King 2011, p. 162). This quotation

emphasizes how trying to reconstruct history from fictitious sources may have unforeseen repercussions. In order to highlight the cascading effects of changing the past, King also makes use of the idea of “Lisbon Loops,” which are isolated temporal anomalies brought about by Jake’s actions. It is difficult to believe in a static and unchanging past since even little changes may have profound and unanticipated effects (King 2011, p. 297).

### **Jake Epping’s Intervention: Disrupting the Historical Flow**

Time travel emerges as a potent narrative device, serving to probe the intricacies of causality and the ramifications of altering pivotal historical events. The protagonist, Jake Epping, finds himself embroiled in a mission to thwart the assassination of John F. Kennedy. With insights derived from both historical documents, biographies, and fictional accounts of the past, Jake embarks on a journey that disrupts the linear trajectory of history itself. Central to Jake’s strategy is his meticulous study of historical documents, biographies, and fictional narratives pertaining to the Kennedy era. However, this heavy reliance on narratives reveals inherent limitations. While historical accounts offer valuable but interpretive insights, fictional narratives, though illuminating, can be fallible or incomplete. As Rebecca West argues, “History is truth agreed upon” (West 1941, p. 102). This quote underscores the subjective nature of historical accounts, highlighting the potential for bias and varying interpretations of events. Jake’s reliance on potentially subjective narratives introduces an element of uncertainty into his mission. As Jake ventures into altering the past, he unwittingly triggers the manifestation of “Lisbon Loops,” self-contained temporal anomalies. These loops symbolize the unpredictable nature of time travel and the butterfly effect, wherein seemingly inconsequential changes can precipitate significant and unforeseen repercussions. Isaac Asimov captures this concept when he states: “The timeless truth about the future is that it cannot be predicted” (Asimov 1964 p. 11). Like Asimov, *11/22/63* demonstrates the inherent uncertainty associated with altering the past, highlighting the potential for unforeseen consequences. Such unforeseen alterations force Jake to confront the unintended consequences of his interventions. For instance, a seemingly minor act of saving a child from an

accident in the past alters the social fabric of the town, highlighting the interconnectedness of historical events.

Further complicating Jake's mission is the discovery that history is not merely a static repository of facts but a dynamic, living entity resistant to manipulation. Jake's attempts to modify events often yield unintended outcomes, underscoring the intricate web of causality that governs historical trajectories. Robert Frost's adage, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference" (Frost 1916), emphasizes the concept of divergent paths and the far-reaching consequences of our choices. Similarly, Jake's interventions in the past create ripples of change that alter the course of history in unforeseen ways. The narrative also delves into the paradoxical implications of time travel. Jake's interventions destabilize the established timeline, prompting profound philosophical contemplations on free will versus determinism. C.S. Lewis ponders this paradox in his sentiment, "But surely the future isn't decided yet?" (Lewis, 1942). King leaves these questions unanswered, compelling readers to grapple with the profound ethical and philosophical implications of temporal interference. The reverberations of Jake's actions in the past profoundly reshape the contemporary social landscape. The "Lisbon Loops" induces unexpected alterations in the present, with once-familiar characters possibly ceasing to exist and the foundational social fabric of the town undergoing transformation. This reinforces the interconnectedness of historical events. Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, famously stated, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man" (Heraclitus). This quote highlights the concept of constant change, which is mirrored in the way Jake's actions in the past ripple outwards, transforming the present in unexpected ways.

Moreover, Jake's success in averting Kennedy's assassination engenders a radically different present, thereby illustrating the cascading effects of rewriting history on a national scale. Amid these temporal and social upheavals, the narrative raises pertinent ethical quandaries. Jake grapples with these moral complexities, realizing that ostensibly positive alterations can precipitate unforeseen negative repercussions. Al Templeton, the owner of the diner that serves as the portal to the past, warns Jake about the dangers of altering the past, stating, "There are things you can't

change. The past is a stubborn mule” (King 2011, p. 149). This quote emphasizes the potential futility of attempting to rewrite history, highlighting the resistance that the past may offer to any alterations. Through the intricate framework of time travel, King crafts a compelling narrative that invites readers to contemplate the interwoven continuum of past, present, and future. *11/22/63* serves as a cautionary tale, compelling us to reflect upon the profound implications and potential pitfalls of attempting to rewrite history.

### **A Nuanced Dialogue: Fiction and Social Commentary**

History is not merely a collection of dry facts and figures; it is a rich tapestry woven from personal accounts, official records, and, intriguingly, fictional narratives. While the role of historical documents and biographies in shaping our understanding of the past is undeniable, fictional works can exert a potent, albeit often subtle, influence on our collective memory. Historical fiction, for instance, allows readers to connect with the past on an emotional level. By immersing themselves in the characters’ experiences and perspectives, readers gain a deeper understanding of the social norms, motivations, and challenges of bygone eras. Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* trilogy, for example, vividly portrays the court of Henry VIII, enabling readers to experience the political machinations and social anxieties of Tudor England in a manner that dry historical accounts might not achieve. As Hilary Mantel herself states, “Historical fiction allows us to walk in the shoes of history” (Mantel 2009). Furthermore, fictional narratives can fill in the gaps left by the historical record, exploring the personal lives and motivations of historical figures who may have left behind limited documentation. Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy, for instance, offers a fictionalized account of the experiences of World War I soldiers, providing a nuanced portrayal of the psychological impact of war beyond mere battlefield statistics. However, the primary goal of fiction is not always historical accuracy. Authors may take creative liberties to enhance the narrative or explore specific themes, blurring the lines between fact and fiction and potentially creating misconceptions about the past. Umberto Eco, in his novel *Foucault’s Pendulum*, demonstrates how historical conspiracy theories can be woven into seemingly factual narratives”,

highlighting the challenges of discerning truth from fiction. As Eco warns, “We are living through a cultural collapse. We are losing the ability to distinguish what is real from what is fabricated” (Eco 1988). Moreover, fiction can perpetuate existing biases or stereotypes, with authors possibly projecting their own worldview onto the past, thereby creating a distorted picture of historical events.

Certain portrayals of Native Americans in historical fiction, for instance, might reinforce stereotypical narratives of savagery rather than offering a nuanced understanding of their cultures and experiences. Chinua Achebe, in his landmark work *Things Fall Apart*, challenges the traditional Western narrative of colonialism in Africa, offering a more nuanced perspective on the impact of European intervention. Achebe himself believed that “The purpose of fiction is not to tell people what to think, but to make them think” (Achebe 1990). This poses the question of whether fiction can serve as a corrective tool, challenging established narratives and prompting a reevaluation of historical events. Additionally, the potential for misinformation in fictionalized history raises concerns about the accountability of authors in ensuring historical accuracy. The line between creative interpretation and historical fabrication can indeed be blurry. Traditionally, historical narratives have been dominated by the perspectives of the victors or those in power. Works like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* give voice to the experiences of enslaved people, challenging the traditional whitewashed narratives of American history. As Morrison argues, “If there is a story that has not been told, it is the story of the enslaved woman” (Morrison 1987). Thus, the power of fiction lies in its ability to spark dialogue and critical thinking about the past. By acknowledging the influence of fictional narratives on our understanding of history and engaging with the ethical considerations involved, we can foster a more nuanced and multifaceted appreciation of the past.



## **Beyond Determinism: Fiction's Power and Social Critique**

History, often perceived as a rigid chronology of events, can feel preordained, a deterministic path where the future is inevitably shaped by the past. Yet, nestled amongst dry historical accounts and dusty archives lies a potent force that challenges this perception: fiction. Literature, with its ability to weave narratives that transcend documented realities, offers a powerful tool for exploring alternative possibilities, critiquing societal constructs, and ultimately, prompting critical reflection on the human experience. One of fiction's greatest strengths lies in its ability to delve into hypothetical scenarios and explore the "what if" of history. By crafting narratives that deviate from established timelines, authors invite readers to contemplate the potential ripple effects of seemingly minor alterations. Ray Bradbury's dystopian masterpiece, *Fahrenheit 451*, for instance, depicts a future where books are outlawed, and knowledge is suppressed. Through this fictional world, Bradbury compels us to consider the dangers of censorship and the importance of critical thinking in a society increasingly reliant on technology and mass media. As the butterfly effect suggests, even the most minute changes in the initial conditions can have profound and unforeseen consequences.

This concept is masterfully illustrated in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, an alternate history novel that explores a world where the Axis powers emerged victorious in World War II. This fictional exploration allows readers to grapple with the potential ramifications of historical events and the fragility of societal structures we often take for granted. Dick himself highlights the power of fiction to challenge established narratives, stating, "Reality is a consensus, a dream we all agree to dream" (Dick 1981, p. 211). By fracturing the illusion of a fixed reality, fiction allows us to reimagine the past and contemplate the potential trajectories of history. Literature transcends mere entertainment; it serves as a powerful platform for social critique. Authors, through their fictional worlds, can expose and challenge the injustices and inequalities embedded within a society. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for instance, sheds light on the deeply ingrained racial prejudice of the American South during the 1930s. By weaving a narrative centered on a young girl's perspective of racial injustice, Lee compels readers to confront the ugliness of racism and the importance of empathy and compassion in the face of prejudice. The power of fiction lies

not only in exposing societal ills but also in dismantling the very structures that perpetuate them. Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, portrays a future theocratic state where women are subjugated, and their reproductive rights are brutally controlled. Atwood utilizes this fictional world to critique the patriarchal power structures and societal norms that limit female agency in the real world. As Atwood herself argues, "Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive. It describes the present" (Atwood 2004, p. 35). By creating a chilling yet believable dystopia, Atwood compels readers to critically examine the direction our own society might be headed.

Traditionally, historical narratives have been dominated by the perspectives of the victors or those in power. Fiction, however, has the power to challenge these monolithic narratives by giving voice to the marginalized and silenced. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, offers a poignant account of the Nigerian Civil War from the perspectives of characters caught in the crossfire. By weaving a fictional narrative that incorporates the experiences of ordinary people, Adichie challenges the often-simplified portrayal of historical events and underscores the human cost of conflict. Moreover, fictional narratives can offer alternative perspectives on historical events that challenge established biases. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a magical realist novel set against the backdrop of India's partition, explores the complexities of national identity and the lingering effects of colonialism. Rushdie's work illustrates how fiction can be used to deconstruct dominant narratives and offer a more nuanced understanding of historical events. As Rushdie states, "If you don't have the stories of the conquered, the history of the world becomes very limited... fiction is the great corrective" (Rushdie 1991, p. 12).

### **Fiction and the Power of Empathy: Cultivating a More Just Future**

Beyond its analytical and critical functions, fiction offers a potent tool for cultivating empathy and understanding. By immersing ourselves in the fictional worlds and experiences of others, we can develop a deeper understanding of human motivations and the complexities of the human

condition. This ability to empathize is crucial for fostering social change and building a more just future. For instance, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, a novel set in war-torn Afghanistan, tells the story of Amir, a young boy who witnesses a horrific act of violence. The narrative unfolds through Amir's eyes, allowing readers to experience his guilt, shame, and ultimately, his quest for redemption. As we navigate Amir's internal struggles, we gain a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of trauma and the complexities of human morality. John Green, author of *The Fault in Our Stars*, captures the essence of this empathetic connection when he states, "You can't write a story about a character without loving them a little" (Green 2014). By fostering a connection with Amir, even with all his flaws, Hosseini encourages readers to confront difficult issues and cultivate compassion for those who have made mistakes.

Furthermore, fiction allows us to transcend the limitations of our own experiences and enter worlds vastly different from our own. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her TED Talk titled *The Danger of a Single Story*, argues that we rely on stereotypes and limited narratives to understand the world around us. Fiction, however, offers a powerful antidote to this. Through exposure to diverse characters and situations, literature allows us to challenge our preconceived notions and develop a more nuanced understanding of human experience. For example, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, while primarily aimed at a young audience, tackles complex themes of prejudice, social justice, and the fight against oppression. By following the journey of Harry, a young wizard navigating a world divided by prejudice, readers develop empathy for the marginalized and understand the importance of fighting for what's right. The power of empathy cultivated through fiction extends beyond individual characters and narratives. It allows us to connect with the collective experiences of entire communities and historical periods. Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*, a heart-wrenching exploration of trauma and survival, compels readers to confront the devastating impact of war and violence. By delving into the protagonist's harrowing journey, Yanagihara fosters empathy for the countless individuals who have endured similar experiences throughout history. This empathetic connection can inspire readers to become advocates for social change and work towards a more just future.

## **Fiction and the Exploration of Moral Dilemmas**

Literature's ability to present complex moral dilemmas within fictional contexts allows readers to grapple with difficult questions in a safe and controlled environment. By inhabiting the perspectives of characters facing impossible choices, we can explore the nuances of morality and the ethical implications of our actions. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, a dystopian novel that explores the ethics of human cloning, compels readers to grapple with questions of identity, mortality, and the value of human life. Through this fictional world, Ishiguro encourages critical reflection on the potential consequences of scientific advancements and the moral responsibility that comes with them. Furthermore, fiction can expose the ethical ambiguities that often exist within real-world situations. Joseph Heller's satirical masterpiece, *Catch-22*, sheds light on the absurdity and moral complexities of war. By presenting the experiences of soldiers trapped in a seemingly endless conflict, Heller compels readers to question the justifications for war and the human cost of following orders blindly. As Toni Morrison argues, "Fiction allows us to explore the ethical ambiguities of life with no recourse to punishment" (Morrison 1993, p.17). By grappling with moral dilemmas within the fictional realm, readers develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the complexities of ethical decision-making.

Fiction transcends mere entertainment. It serves as a powerful tool for challenging historical paradigms, critiquing societal constructs, fostering empathy, and exploring ethical dilemmas. By inviting readers to contemplate alternative realities, grapple with complex issues, and connect with diverse experiences, literature plays a vital role in shaping a more just and equitable world. As George R.R. Martin, author of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, states, "A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one" (Martin 2001). Through the transformative power of fiction, we can transcend the limitations of our own perspectives and cultivate a deeper understanding of human experience, ultimately paving the way for a more empathetic and just future.

## **Fiction's Power to Breathe Life into the Past**

History, often perceived as a static collection of dates and events, can feel distant and irrelevant. Yet, the past exerts a profound influence on the present, shaping our societies, cultures, and even our individual lives. Understanding the past is not merely an academic pursuit; it's essential for navigating the complexities of the present and building a better future. In this endeavor, fiction emerges as a powerful tool, complementing historical accounts with its ability to breathe life into the past, foster empathy for historical figures, and ultimately, prompt critical reflection on the enduring significance of the past. As historian E.H. Carr argued, "The historian is not a passive observer... He is a participant in a dialogue between the past, the present and the future" (Carr 1961, p.2). Fiction allows us to actively participate in this dialogue, enriching our understanding of the past and its connection to the present. Unlike dry historical accounts, fiction allows readers to connect with the past on an emotional level. By inhabiting the perspectives of historical figures or fictional characters living in bygone eras, readers gain a deeper understanding of the social norms, anxieties, and motivations that shaped historical events. In *11/22/63*, King meticulously recreates the sights, sounds, and atmosphere of 1960s America. Jake's encounters with ordinary people – a friendly diner owner, Al, who becomes his confidante, says "There's something about the past, Jake. You can touch it. You can smell it. You can taste it" (King 2011, p.34). Through these interactions, King allows readers to experience history not just as a collection of facts but as a lived experience. This ability to evoke a sense of immediacy extends beyond historical figures and events.

Fiction can also illuminate the everyday lives of ordinary people, often lost in the grand narratives of history. As Toni Morrison, the Nobel Prize-winning author, argues, "We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives" (Morrison 1993). Through the language of fiction, we can bridge the gap between the present and the past, fostering a deeper understanding of the historical figures who have shaped the world we live in today. By humanizing these figures and their stories, fiction allows us to not only learn from the past but also connect with the ongoing human drama that continues to unfold across the centuries.

## Understanding Historical Figures Through Fiction

Historical figures often reside in a distant realm, their names and faces etched on monuments and textbooks, but their humanity obscured by the passage of time. Fiction, however, serves as a powerful bridge, allowing us to connect with these figures on a personal level and foster empathy for their motivations and actions. By delving into the inner lives, anxieties, and desires of historical characters, fictional narratives breathe life into the past, enabling us to see these figures not just as names on a page, but as complex individuals grappling with the realities of their time. The ability to forge emotional connections with historical figures extends beyond individual narratives. Hilary Mantel, in her acclaimed Wolf Hall trilogy, delves into the court of Henry VIII. By exploring the king's inner world – his political machinations, personal desires, and ruthless streak – Mantel challenges the simplistic portrayals of Henry VIII as a mere tyrant. She presents a nuanced portrait, revealing a man shaped by ambition, insecurity, and the complexities of his time. As Mantel herself states, “We are not simply flesh and blood; we are webs of relationships” (Mantel, 2012). Through fiction, we can unravel these webs, understanding how historical figures were shaped by the social, political, and cultural forces around them, fostering a deeper understanding of their actions and motivations. Furthermore, fiction allows us to confront the moral ambiguities that historical figures often faced. By inhabiting their perspectives within fictional contexts, we can grapple with the difficult choices they made and the ethical complexities of their situations.

For instance, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays the inner turmoil of Okonkwo, a traditional Igbo leader struggling to reconcile his ancestral beliefs with the encroaching forces of colonialism. By inhabiting Okonkwo's perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of the challenges he faced and the tragic consequences of his choices. This exploration of moral dilemmas within fictionalized historical settings allows us to move beyond simple judgments and develop a more nuanced understanding of the historical figures and the contexts in which they operated. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the line between historical accuracy and creative license can be blurry. Authors may take liberties to enhance the narrative or explore

specific themes, potentially introducing fictional elements or embellishing existing accounts. Critical engagement with the text is therefore essential. Readers should be aware of the author's perspective and consult historical sources to verify the portrayal of events and figures.

## Conclusion

*11/22/63* transcends the boundaries of a simple time travel adventure. Through Jake Epping's odyssey, King compels readers to grapple with the complex interplay between fiction and social realities. The novel demonstrates the power of narratives to shape our understanding of the past and challenge deterministic views of history. By highlighting the ethical complexities of rewriting history, King invites us to consider the potential and pitfalls of narrative-driven interventions in the established social order. Ultimately, *11/22/63* serves as a testament to the enduring power of fiction as a tool for social critique, prompting readers to examine the historical forces that shape our present and contemplate the possibilities for a more just future.

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## Understanding State Formation in Early Medieval India: A Case Study of Kashmir

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### Abstract

*The early medieval period in India holds significant importance in the historical periodization of the subcontinent, owing to the transformative changes that occurred during this era. Among these changes, the emergence of regional states stands out as a crucial historical development. This paper focuses on the region of Kashmir, delving into its history to gain a comprehensive understanding of state formation during the early medieval period. Above all, the findings of this research provide valuable insights into the historical context of early medieval Kashmir, highlighting the region's unique characteristics and contributions to the broader narrative of state formation in India.*

**Key Words:** Early Medieval, Regionalism, State Formation, Damaras

### Introduction:

The examination of the state, including the aspect such as state formation, emerged as a significant aspect of early medieval India. Before delving into its analysis, it is essential to explore the perspectives that rendered it an important subject of study (Sahu,1994,88-98). The study of Indian history underwent significant changes with the arrival of colonial writings, introducing a novel framework to characterize the Indian historical narrative, termed 'oriental despotism.' According to this concept, the despotic ruler exercised control over all aspects of society through an autocratic bureaucracy. It was believed that private ownership of land did not exist in Asia, and instead, all land was owned by the king (Thapar, 2003,6). This perspective created a contrasting image of India compared to Europe, which was further examined by Karl Marx in his analysis of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production.' Within this framework, despotism and stagnation were portrayed as key characteristics of pre-British India.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Indian nationalists primarily focused on producing dynastic histories that aimed to showcase the presence of change within Indian history. Notable historians of this period, such as R.C. Majumdar (editor of 'The History and Culture of the Indian People' series) and Hemchandra Raychaudhuri ('Political History of Ancient India'), consistently depicted a centralized imperial structure, supported by a significant and influential bureaucratic system. This emphasis gained significance primarily due to the aspirations of Indian nationalists, who aimed to portray a transformative history, albeit with a predominant political perspective.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, a new group of Marxist historians emerged who tried to explore Indian history through socio-economic perspective. Among these visionary scholars, D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma led the way, propounding a compelling model known as 'Indian Feudalism.' Their ground breaking work aimed to unravel the intricate social and economic dynamics that shaped India's past. Central to their perspective was the notion that the period spanning the 6th to the 12th centuries was characterized by disintegration and decline. This phenomenon was attributed to the decentralization of power, as the authority once held by the king fragmented and was distributed among land-grant recipients, including Brahmins and political subordinates (Sharma, 1987,168-77).

Hermann Kulke and B.D. Chattopadhyaya put forth a novel framework known as the integrative model to understand the history of India between 600 and 1200/1300 CE, commonly referred to as the early medieval period. While Marxists perceived this era as a time of decline and disintegration, Chattopadhyaya presented a different viewpoint, suggesting that the emergence of regional kingdoms actually fostered the integration of India through the development of state structures, bureaucracies, and the establishment of new social and economic relationships. The integrative model emphasizes the importance of regional state formation as a key feature during the early medieval period, with each region exhibiting distinct characteristics in this process due to different economic and geographical potentialities of the regions (Sahu, 2013,152-178). Regions, it is often argued that, are integral components of a larger whole and not independent entities in themselves. Consequently, regions are not isolated or unchanging entities; instead, they exist within a framework of extensive connections, interactions, and ongoing transformations. To comprehend the correlation between a region and the outside world, it is essential to position the selected region within its larger spatial

context. Thus, the present work tries to comprehend the formation of the state in Kashmir during the early medieval context as an integral part of a larger whole, not as an independent entity.

The early medieval period witnessed a crucial development in the form of regional kingdoms and the establishment of states at a regional level. In this context, the focus will remain on to examine how various factors such as dynastic rule, economic considerations, administrative systems, and religious legitimacy played pivotal roles in the formation of the state in Kashmir. As R.L. Hangloo argues that the state formation model proposed by Chattopadhyay can be seen replicated in the region of Kashmir (Hangloo,2022,18-62). Consequently, the state formation in Kashmir stands out among the various regional states of India. To establish a contextual background on state formation in Kashmir during the early medieval period, it becomes imperative to present the early historical era of Kashmir.

Kashmir is a region that is surrounded by high mountains on all sides, which makes its geography challenging. However, this same geography also provides natural protection against outside invaders. But apart from its tough geography Kashmir became part of some known powerful empires of early historical period which includes Mauryans, Indo-Greeks, Kushans, and Huns. The first historical figure in Kashmir history is none other than the reign of Asoka, from where we are able to establish a stronger historical foundation to Kashmir history. However, our knowledge of the Mauryas' presence in Kashmir primarily relies on Kalhana's work and on a limited number of archaeological references. These archaeological references have aided in establishing cultural connections with the Mauryas. After the Mauryan Empire fell, Kashmir became part of Indo-Greek empire. Then Kashmir came under the influence of Kushan rule among whom Kanishka was notable who chose Kashmir as the focal point for their extensive military campaigns against the Chinese in Eastern Turkestan. After Kushans another nomadic tribe make their presence in India are Huns who became responsible to some extent in the emergence of regional kingdoms, as evidenced by various sources (Thakur, 1967,86-131). After Huns Regionalism became a prominent feature in all major spheres of life and culture, marking the beginning of what is now known as the early medieval period. Same time in Kashmir, state formation was started and became one of powerful kingdoms.

During the early medieval period, Kashmir emerged as one of the significant regional kingdoms, alongside other notable states such as Rashtrakutas, Palas, Gurjara Pratihara, and more. This particular region witnessed the emergence of significant dynasties, namely the Karkotas, Utpalas, and Loharas. The rise of these dynasties in Kashmir showcases the region's remarkable political dynamism. Each dynasty brought its own distinct cultural and political characteristics to the region, leading to periods of stability and consolidation during their respective reigns (Devadevan, 2020, 1-26). The phenomenon of state formation has been visualized as a 'crucial agent of change' in the regional context as it provided a degree of cohesion among local elements of culture by providing them a focus and at the same time mediated in the assimilation of ideas, symbols, and rituals which had a much wider territorial spread and acceptability. This period brought about substantial transformations for Kashmir, with the Huns playing a pivotal role in shaping Indian history made Kashmir as their political hub, which contributed to the region's evolution. The establishment of a state in 6th century in Kashmir marked the onset of the early medieval period in its history as contextualized in main land history. This pivotal development started by Huns in sixth century and consolidated by following kingdoms. Under the rule of the Huns, Mihirakula played a significant role as a ruler who actively sought to regain his lost territories in the lower Indus region made Kashmir as their political capital. Kalhana, the chronicler of Kashmir, depicted Mihirakula as a malevolent and merciless tyrant, responsible for brutal massacres of the populace. He destroyed the Buddhist *viharas* on a large scale, granted one hundred *agraharas* to Kashmiri Brahmins out of Gandhara land in order to get local support for his rule. The Huns' occupation of Kashmir brought about a noteworthy transformation in the region's political landscape, as it emerged as a prominent and influential state for the first time in recorded history. Certainly, the emergence of Kashmir as a great regional state was the handiwork of Huns which they bequeathed to the Karkotas who maintained the tradition as true heirs of their great ancestors.

The accession of Durlabhavardhana in 625-661 AD marked a significant turning point in Kashmir's history. Durlabhavardhana's rise to power signalled the beginning of the influential Karkota dynasty's rule. This dynasty fabricated a genealogy that traced their family's origins back to the Naga lineage. This fabrication served as a strong foundation for their political rule, as establishing a mythical ancestry was an important means of legitimizing power at the regional level. Durlabhavardhana and his minister-built temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu in

order to get religious legitimation for his rule. After the passing of Durlabhavardhana, his son Pratapaditya II (661-711 AD) took over as the ruler. An interesting aspect of Pratapaditya II's reign is the inscription found on his coins, which bore the legend 'Sri-Pratapa.' This inscription not only highlighted the political and economic ties that Kashmir had established with other kingdoms throughout India under the Karkota rule but also played a significant role in shaping the formation of the state. Chandrapida (711-719 AD) succeeded Pratapaditya and was mentioned in the Chinese Annals as the ruler of Kashmir in 713 AD. His influence was significant enough that the Chinese emperor recognized him as a king in 719-720 AD. This recognition demonstrates the extent of Chandrapida's power and authority during that time. But it was Lalitaditya of this dynasty who rose to prominence by undertaking remarkable conquests that elevated the region's significance. His achievements are revered as some of the greatest in both Kashmir and Indian history (Kapur, 1975, 1-22). The notable campaign led by Lalitaditya was against Yasovarman of Kanauj, the prominent ruler of India at that time. Kalhana supported it by arguing that Lalitaditya makes this kingdom a tributary to the mighty Kashmir state. Encouraged by this triumph, Lalitaditya aimed to conquer the entirety of India. Kalhana further recounts that Lalitaditya emerged victorious in his endeavours, allegedly conquering regions like Kalinga, Karnataka, the areas along the Kaveri River, and Gauda. These conquests of Lalitaditya made Kashmir as a formidable regional power during the early medieval period. Lalitaditya, explicitly hailed as a Sarvabhauma ruler, exemplified his authority extending across the entire land. This extraordinary distinction set him apart from his contemporaries, whose power remained confined to specific regions. It stands as a testament to the immense strength and influence of Kashmir as a regional power during that era (Roy, 2003, 52-65). Lalitaditya's greatness surpassed his military achievements, encompassing his patronage of both Buddhism and Brahmanical gods such as Shiva and Vishnu. He left a lasting architectural legacy by establishing numerous temples and towns, exemplified by the magnificent structures of Martand and Lalitapura. Under his reign, public services were reorganized, and new buildings were constructed. He prioritized the well-being of his subjects by providing irrigation facilities to cultivators and implementing relief measures during unforeseen calamities (Bamzai, 1994, 122). These actions not only raised the ruler's stature among the people but also facilitated agrarian expansion and urbanization, which were crucial for extending and consolidating political authority and establishing a strong foundation for the state. However,

following Lalitaditya's rule, the Karkota dynasty witnessed a succession of weak kings who struggled to maintain the power and prestige of their predecessors.

After the rule of the Karkotas, the Utpalas ascended to power and played a crucial role in strengthening the regional kingdom of Kashmir. It was Avantivarman, the revered founder of the Utpala dynasty, ruled for an impressive 28 years (855-883 CE). His rule wasn't marked by military conquests; instead, it became renowned for bringing great economic prosperity to Kashmir. Avantivarman accomplished this by focusing on agriculture. He built an extensive network of canals to improve irrigation, reclaimed waterlogged areas to make them usable, established many new rural settlements, and took measures to prevent flooding by dredging the Jhelum River and reinforcing its banks. These endeavours significantly increased agricultural production in the region. In simpler terms, Avantivarman's rule was a time of economic growth and stability for Kashmir. These efforts led to increased food production and improved the overall prosperity of the kingdom. Avantivarman's rule brought consolidation and prosperity to a kingdom that had faced problems in the past (Rangachari,2009,55). Avantivarman focused on maintaining harmony within the kingdom and improving the lives of the people. Under his rule, Kashmir enjoyed a break from both natural disasters and human-made troubles. Avantivarman, along with his trusted minister Sura, embarked on constructing temples and towns, which not only became thriving centres of trade but also contributed to the overall prosperity of the region. In Avantipura, the town founded by Avantivarman, two temples were erected, one dedicated to Visnu and the other to Siva. This deliberate act aimed to foster acceptance and unity among followers of both sects. Samkaravarman, who became the ruler after his father Avantivarman (883-902 CE), had a different approach to governance. Unlike his father, he was more interested in conquering new territories. However, he was a narrow-minded and greedy king, unlike his father. During his rule, he imposed heavy taxes on the people, leading to their oppression. He captured villages that were once bestowed upon different temples by previous kings, looting a total of 64 temples. This led to a loss of faith in him among the people. He exhibited a preference for the Kayastha caste, a newly prominent group in Kashmir serving as clerks. He sought their assistance to enhance tax collection, thus fostering a mutually beneficial relationship. Additionally, he implemented a harsh system called 'Begar,' which forced villagers into labour, particularly for transportation purposes. This system caused immense suffering for the villagers and continued in Kashmir's administration

until the early 1900s. After Samkaravarman's tumultuous reign, Kashmir plunged into a period of turmoil and instability.

Parvagupta, who established a new dynasty around 949-950 CE, hailed from a modest family of clerks rather than from a royal lineage. In order to gain acceptance as a ruler by the Brahmins, he undertook the construction of a shrine dedicated to Siva, known as Parvaguptesvara. Understanding the significance of alliances and support in securing his reign, Parvagupta strategically arranged the marriages of his two daughters. One daughter was wedded to Choja, a prominent minister, while the other married Bhubhata, another influential figure in the court. By forging these alliances, Parvagupta sought to solidify his position and garner the support necessary for a smooth succession. These actions shed light on the prevailing circumstances of the time and highlight the growing importance of such strategic marriages and alliances in securing and maintaining power during Parvagupta's reign. Parvagupta's son Kshemagupta became ruler in 950 CE and married Loharian Princess, Didda. This marriage strengthened the influence of Kashmir state among neighbouring kingdoms, particularly in Lohara kingdom. In 981 A.D., Queen Didda ascended to the throne, facing a conspiracy made by her opponents. Sensing the gravity of the situation, Queen Didda employed a strategic policy of corruption to garner support from the Brahmins. Through this method, she managed to avert the threat to her rule, highlighting the indispensability of Brahmin support for the political survival of a ruler (Bamzai,2009,149). However, during this period, a confederacy formed by local feudal barons called Damaras instigated chaos, making it extremely challenging for any ruler to bring about peace. Among the feudal barons, the Tantrins, Ekanagas and Lavanyas held significant influence, essentially acting as kingmakers and selling the crown to the highest bidder. They seem to have been tribes of professional soldiers who in later times formed into formidable condottiere and became virtually king-makers. Overtime, they integrated into Kashmiri society as military castes, and in some instances, even assimilated into settled peasant communities. Their actions, combined with the Mongol invasion, contributed to the decline of Hindu rule in Kashmir.

Samgramaraja ascended the throne after Didda, ushering in the era of the Lohara dynasty in Kashmir (Saxena,1974,160). Kalhana describes this event as the third remarkable shift in the ruling lineages of the region. During this period, Brahmins experienced a significant rise in power and boldly involved themselves in state affairs without hesitation. They exerted pressure



on rulers, coercing them to make decisions in their favour. Brahmins even served in the military, as exemplified by Bhujamga, the son of a Brahmin Samantha, who held a significant position in Samgramaraja's army. Bhujamga compelled Samgramaraja to constantly seek refuge in different locations, demonstrating the extent of their authority. Kalhana's father, Champaka, occupied the esteemed role of commander of forts under King Harsa for an extended period. Not only were they granted *Agraharas* (land grants for Brahmins), but they also received valuable gifts such as cows, gold, horses, jewels, and more, solidifying their influential status within society. Consequently, politically, Brahmins emerged as a force to be reckoned with. Through Purohita corporations, which resorted to hunger strikes (*prayopavasa*) whenever the king or his ministers made decisions contrary to their interests or those of the country, the Brahmin class effectively check the power of the monarch. The Brahmin assemblies were often called upon to select a suitable candidate for the throne during interregnums, showcasing their role in shaping the political landscape. This period coincided with Mahmud of Ghazni's invasions in northern India and several unsuccessful attempts to conquer Kashmir, reflecting the political upheaval in the region (Singh,2006,243). It shows even troubled history of Kashmir rolled back Mahmud of Ghazni in his attempt to conquer Kashmir. These events played a pivotal role in shaping the course of Indian history, and Kashmir was not exempt from their impact. The aftermath of Mahmud's invasions brought disturbing and declining conditions to Kashmir, similar to other regions in the subcontinent of threatening the independence. However, due to its geographical location, Kashmir managed to avert foreign invasions more effectively than other parts of India. Nevertheless, these invasions weakened the state politically. Ananta, Kalasa, and Harsa skilfully governed the region, implementing wise policies to maintain stability and even included Muslims in their armies. Ananta relied heavily on the guidance and administrative expertise of two influential Sahi princes, Rudrapala and Diddapala, who served under him. These princes commanded significant influence and received substantial compensation for their services. Ananta strategically married Suryamati, the younger sister of Rudrapala, in an effort to secure the support of powerful ministers and safeguard the state against potential rebellions by such influential figures. During this whole disturbing period, the economy of state was in declining condition which forced Harsa to resort looting of temples to replenish the treasury and finance the payment of troops necessary to suppress the growing power of the Damaras, who had risen to become dominant rulers (Kaul,

1963,41). Thus, Kashmir fell victim to internal problems and adventurers who attempted to diminish its sovereignty.

By the beginning of the 13th century AD, Islam had gained significant ground in northern India and Central Asia. Although Kashmir had successfully withstood attacks from Muslim conquerors like Ghazni, it gradually came under the influence of Islamic teachings. The situation in Kashmir further deteriorated with the devastating Mongol invasion in 1320 CE. When Sahadeva ascended the throne of Kashmir (1301-1320 AD), a period of intrigue, rebellion, and war ensued, lasting for two decades (1318-1338 AD), under Udyandeva and Kota Rani, ultimately establishing Muslim rule in the region. The establishment of a Muslim rule brought an end to the regional state that had emerged during early medieval period through the efforts of the Huns, Karkotas, and Utpalas. This transition shares striking similarities with the transformation of rule observed in other parts of the subcontinent during the shift from Hindu to Muslim rule or from the early medieval to the medieval period.

#### **In conclusion**

The emergence of the early medieval period in Indian history witnessed the ascent of regionalism, with Kashmir emerging as a prominent regional state. The initial efforts of the Huns played a pivotal role in establishing Kashmir as a political centre, laying the groundwork for its regional significance. The zenith of Kashmir's history was marked by the brief but illustrious imperial rule of Lalitaditya, a time when virtues and talents flourished, propelling the kingdom to unparalleled glory under distinguished monarchs. Despite the undignified end of the Karkota dynasty, the subsequent rule of Avantivarman from the Utpala dynasty ushered in an era of benevolence, peace, and patronage for learning and the arts. However, the subsequent trajectory of Kashmir took a downturn. As the early medieval period drew to a close, Kashmir, very much similar to other regions in the subcontinent, experienced the advent of Muslim rule or the medieval period. While the onset of Muslim rule in Kashmir occurred later due to geographical factors and military efforts, it unfolded in a manner parallel to other regions. In essence, the complex process of state formation in Kashmir was shaped by a confluence of political, military, economic, and cultural factors, intertwined with the aspirations and ambitions of individual rulers and dynasties. The tapestry of Kashmir's history during this period reflects not only its regional significance but also its resilience and adaptability in the face of historical transitions.

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## **The Nexus of Ethnicity, Language and Power: Understanding Identity politics in Assam**

**Tripti Das**

### **Abstract**

*Ethnic conflict in Assam is a multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in historical, social, and political dynamics. It is seen that North East India has been occupying a unique position in Indian Politics. This paper employs a sociological lens to analyze the complexities of ethnic tensions in Assam, focusing on factors such as identity formation, social stratification, resource distribution, and state-society relations. By examining how social structures, power dynamics, and collective identities intersect, the paper aims to provide insights into the underlying causes and mechanisms of ethnic conflict in Assam and suggests avenues for social cohesion and peace building.*

**Key words:** Assam, Ethnicity, Language, Power, Identity Politics, Northeast India

### **Introduction**

In Northeast India, the social structure is intricately woven with remarkable diversity, primarily due to the presence of numerous indigenous tribal communities. Northeast India grapples with ethnic tensions and identity conflicts, which are deeply intertwined with its social structures and historical narratives. These tensions often stem from competing claims to land, resources, and political representation, reflecting complex socio-cultural dynamics and historical grievances.

In the broader context of India's post-independence nation-building endeavor, the landscape of identity politics in Northeast India revolves around four prominent group identities: linguistic, religious, caste-based, and tribal affiliations. These identities serve as focal points for societal mobilization and political articulation, reflecting the complex interplay between historical

legacies, socio-cultural dynamics, and contemporary political aspirations. Scholars such as Pingle and Varshney (2006) have explored these dynamics, highlighting the ways in which identity politics intersect with broader social structures and historical contexts, shaping the socio-political landscape of the region. Assam, a state situated in northeastern India, epitomizes a rich tapestry of ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, and complex power dynamics. Over the decades, Assam has been a crucible for identity politics, marked by struggles for recognition, representation, and autonomy by various ethnic groups. Central to this dynamic are the intertwined factors of ethnicity, language, and power, which shape the contours of identity formation and political mobilization in the region. This paper aims to unpack these dynamics through a sociological lens, shedding light on the mechanisms through which identities are constructed, negotiated, and contested in Assam.

### **Social Construction of Ethnic Identities: Theoretical framework**

The foundation of identity politics, particularly in India but applicable elsewhere, can be comprehended through the lens of modernization theory and the insights of scholars like Charles Taylor. Contrary to the post-World War II optimism that modernity would erode attachments to religious, ethnic, or caste identities, the trajectory of modernity has engendered diverse outcomes globally (Taylor, 1994, p. 35).

Charles Taylor delineates two pivotal dynamics shaping identity politics: the pursuit of dignity and the quest for authenticity (Taylor, 1992, p. 56). Modernity has supplanted the traditional framework of honor, prevalent in hierarchical social structures, with a discourse centered on dignity. In pre-modern societies, individuals typically adhered to predetermined social roles dictated by birth-based hierarchies. However, the advent of modernity has underscored the intrinsic dignity of all individuals, thereby challenging entrenched hierarchical norms. Consequently, identity politics emerges as a manifestation of the demand for equal dignity and the assertion of unique cultural or individual identities.

Symbolic interactionism highlights the significance of symbols, rituals, and language in shaping ethnic identities, emphasizing the role of social interactions in this process (Blumer, 1969). Social identity theory focuses on how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups,

including ethnic groups, based on shared characteristics, with group memberships influencing individuals' sense of identity and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Ethno-symbolism underscores the importance of symbols, myths, and collective memories in shaping ethnic identities, suggesting that these identities are actively constructed and reconstructed through shared symbols and historical narratives (Smith, 1986). Primordialism, on the other hand, argues that ethnic identities are deeply rooted in biological, historical, or cultural ties, viewing them as natural and immutable (Smith, 1991). Finally, Intersectionality theory highlights the interconnected nature of social categories, including ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality, suggesting that ethnic identities should be understood in relation to other social identities and power dynamics (Crenshaw, 1991).

Central to our comprehension of ethnic conflict is the foundational framework of social identity theory, which elucidates how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups based on ethnicity, and how these group identities shape attitudes, behaviors, and interactions. Social identity theory posits that ethnic conflict emerges when group identities become prominent and are perceived as threatened, leading to intergroup tensions and conflict. Moreover, social identity theory underscores the role of social comparison processes in exacerbating ethnic conflict, as individuals strive to bolster their self-esteem and social identity through favoritism towards their own group and derogation of others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 45).

In summary, the social construction of ethnic identities is a multifaceted process influenced by social interactions, historical legacies, cultural symbols, and power dynamics. By drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as symbolic interactionism, social identity theory, ethno-symbolism, primordialism, and intersectionality, sociologists can gain deeper insights into how ethnic identities are formed, negotiated, and contested within diverse social contexts.

### **Contextualizing Ethnic Conflict in Assam: An Overview**

The sociology of North East India serves as a critical lens through which scholars analyze the intricate tapestry of social structures, cultural dynamics, and historical legacies that define the region's unique socio-political landscape. Through rigorous inquiry grounded in sociological

theory, researchers navigate the complex interplay of diverse social forces that shape the North East's heterogeneous ethnic composition. Marak and Barbora (2018) emphasize the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of this landscape, highlighting how it is shaped by a mosaic of indigenous communities, each with its own distinctive linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics. This diversity underscores the need for nuanced examinations of inter-ethnic relations, historical patterns of migration, and resultant forms of social stratification and identity formation, as underscored by Misra (2009) and Pramanik (2015).

Furthermore, Suantak (2014) delves into the intricate connections between state policies, development initiatives, and grassroots mobilizations, shedding light on the mechanisms through which power dynamics, inequality, and processes of social change manifest in this ethnically diverse and historically contested terrain. Contextualizing contemporary identity politics in Assam necessitates a deep dive into its historical underpinnings, as articulated by Niumai (2015). The region's complex history, marked by waves of migration, colonial encounters, and socio-economic transformations, has left enduring imprints on its social fabric. Misra (2009) elaborates on how the influx of diverse ethnic groups, including the Ahoms, Bengalis, and various indigenous communities, has contributed to the intricate mosaic of cultural identities in the region. Additionally, Pramanik (2015) highlights the enduring impact of colonial legacies, particularly in exacerbating tensions surrounding language and identity, thereby providing a focal point for sociological analysis within the context of North East India.

Moreover, scholars like Das (1997) provide insights into the lived experiences of individuals in marginalized communities, shedding light on issues of violence, suffering, and resilience. Das's work underscores the importance of understanding the human dimensions of social dynamics in the North East. Additionally, the contributions of Madan (1987), Gupta (2000), and Uberoi (2006) offer valuable perspectives on topics such as ethnicity, nationalism, and development, further enriching our understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics at play in the region.

Through these scholarly investigations, researchers deepen our understanding of the region's socio-political complexities and contribute to ongoing dialogues surrounding identity, conflict, and



social change, thereby fostering greater insights into the challenges and opportunities facing North East India.

### **Identity Formation: Construction of Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, and Tribal Identities**

In Assam, various ethnic groups use language to distinguish themselves from others. The Bodo, Karbi, and Mising movements, among others, emphasize the preservation of their languages as a core part of their ethnic identity. These movements often demand autonomy and recognition, highlighting how language can both unify and divide communities (Goswami 2002).

The concept of the social construction of ethnic identities is fundamental to sociology, suggesting that the identities attributed to different ethnic groups are not inherent or fixed but rather shaped by a multitude of social, cultural, historical, and political factors. This perspective underscores the dynamic and fluid nature of identity formation, highlighting the intricate processes through which individuals and groups come to understand and experience their ethnicity within specific social contexts.

In the Indian subcontinent, the construction of ethnic identities has been a central focus of sociological inquiry for decades, reflecting the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political forces. Sociologists have extensively explored the nuances of identity formation among various ethnic groups, aiming to unravel the complexities inherent in these processes.

Baruah (1999, p. 45) offers a sociological analysis of Assamese identity formation. Baruah meticulously traces the historical roots of Assamese identity and examines how factors such as migration, language politics, and ethno-nationalism have shaped the Assamese identity over time. By highlighting the tensions between indigenous Assamese communities and migrants from Bengal, Baruah illuminates the contested nature of Assamese identity in the context of a pluralistic society, shedding light on the sociopolitical dynamics at play.

Chatterjee (1993, p. 78) provides valuable sociological insights into the construction of Bengali identity. Chatterjee delves into the socio-cultural processes through which Bengali identity has been shaped, emphasizing the role of language, literature, and cultural symbols as markers of

collective belonging and resistance against colonial hegemony. Through a sociological lens, Chatterjee elucidates the complexities of Bengali identity formation, contextualizing it within broader historical and colonial legacies.

Tilottoma Misra's study "The Story of the Bodos: Children of the Mist" (2004, p. 112) offers a sociological exploration of Bodo identity formation in the Bodoland region of Assam. Misra meticulously examines the historical struggles of the Bodo community for recognition, autonomy, and cultural preservation, highlighting the sociopolitical factors influencing Bodo identity. By emphasizing the role of language, land, and political mobilization in shaping Bodo identity amidst assimilationist pressures, Misra provides valuable sociological insights into the complexities of ethnic identity formation.

Virginius Xaxa's seminal work "State, Society, and Tribes: Issues in Post-colonial India" (2009, p. 89) offers a sociological perspective on tribal identity formation in India. Xaxa's comprehensive analysis explores the diverse socio-cultural dynamics shaping the identities of indigenous tribes across the country. Through a sociological lens, Xaxa underscores the heterogeneity of tribal communities and the intricate relationships between identity, power, and marginalization in their struggles for autonomy and recognition.

In conclusion, these seminal works, among others, offer invaluable sociological insights into the construction of Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, and Tribal identities in the Indian context. Through nuanced analyses of historical narratives, cultural practices, and socio-political dynamics, these scholars contribute to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of ethnic identity formation and the complexities of identity politics in a diverse and pluralistic society.

### **Historical Hierarchies: Colonial Legacies and Caste Dynamics**

Assam has a long history of cultural synthesis and conflict. The Ahom kingdom (13th-19th centuries) is a significant period when a unique Assamese identity began to solidify, blending local traditions with those of the Tai-Ahom people. Post-colonial Assam witnessed a resurgence of cultural and linguistic pride, partly as a response to colonial policies and later, to post-independence centralization efforts by the Indian government (Baruah 1999).

In Edward Gait's seminal work "A History of Assam" (1905), he meticulously examines the socio-political landscape of Assam during the colonial period under British rule. Gait's analysis underscores the significant impact of British colonial policies on the social hierarchy and caste dynamics within Assamese society. One key aspect that Gait elucidates is the role of land tenure systems and administrative practices in restructuring power relations along caste lines. Through the implementation of these policies, the British colonial administration inadvertently reinforced existing caste hierarchies while simultaneously introducing new forms of social stratification. Gait's exploration thus highlights the intricate ways in which colonial interventions intersected with indigenous social structures, reshaping the socio-economic landscape of Assam.

Srirupa Roy's article "Caste, Colonialism and Counter-Modernity: Notes on a Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Caste" (2009) delves into the sociological dimensions of caste dynamics in colonial Assam. Roy's analysis extends beyond a mere historical account, focusing on the enduring sociocultural ramifications of colonial interventions on caste relations and identities. Roy elucidates how British colonial policies disrupted traditional caste norms and practices, leading to the emergence of new caste configurations and power dynamics. By adopting a postcolonial hermeneutic, Roy critically examines the complexities of caste as a social construct in the colonial context, emphasizing its role in shaping notions of modernity and resistance. Through this lens, Roy's work contributes to a deeper sociological understanding of caste as both a product and a site of contestation within the postcolonial trajectory of Assam.

### **Economic Disparities: Class Divisions and Marginalization**

Amalendu Guha's seminal work "Economic History of Assam" (1983) offers a comprehensive analysis of the economic landscape of Assam, tracing the evolution of class divisions and economic disparities within the region. Guha delves into the multifaceted impacts of colonialism, agrarian transformations, and industrialization on the patterns of economic marginalization prevalent in Assam. He highlights how British colonial policies often favored certain ethnic groups at the expense of others, thereby exacerbating existing economic and social stratifications that endured beyond independence. Guha also examines the introduction of tea plantations and the

subsequent influx of laborers, which not only transformed the demographic composition but also sowed seeds of ethnic and linguistic tensions in the region.

Economic Inequality in Northeast India: Issues and Dimensions," edited by B.C. Baruah and S. Subba Rao (2017), is a collaborative effort that compiles essays exploring various facets of economic inequality in Northeast India, with a specific focus on Assam. The contributors to this volume delve into factors such as land ownership patterns, industrial development, and government policies, shedding light on the persistent challenges of economic marginalization faced by the region. Through a diverse range of perspectives, the edited volume provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of economic inequality in Assam and its broader implications for the socio-economic landscape of Northeast India.

### **Political Marginalization: Representation and Governance Issues**

In the sociological literature, scholars have extensively delved into the intricate dynamics of political marginalization, representation, and governance issues in Assam, particularly within the framework of ethnic conflict. Through a multitude of scholarly works, a deeper understanding of these themes has been cultivated, shedding light on the complexities inherent in Assamese society.

Biswas and Suklabaidya's examination of "the historical roots of ethnic conflict" emphasizes the profound implications of historical legacies on contemporary governance structures in Assam (2019). By tracing the origins of ethnic tensions, they illuminate how past injustices continue to shape political realities and influence power dynamics within the region. Their analysis underscores the necessity of addressing historical grievances in the pursuit of effective and inclusive governance.

Kikon's ethnographic research provides valuable insights into the challenges encountered in fostering inclusive democracy within culturally diverse societies like Assam (2018). By immersing herself in the lived experiences of various ethnic groups, Kikon highlights the complexities of negotiating ethnic identities within the political sphere. Her work underscores the importance of recognizing and accommodating diverse perspectives in governance processes to ensure equitable representation and participation.

Mahanta's analysis of the Bodo movement offers a nuanced understanding of ethnic marginalization and the quest for political recognition among marginalized communities in Assam (2009). Through a sociological lens, Mahanta elucidates the socio-political context surrounding the Bodo community's struggle for identity and autonomy. His study underscores the broader implications of ethnic mobilization for governance structures and political representation in Assamese society.

Furthermore, Fernandes and Barbora's edited volume provides a comprehensive sociological perspective on various dimensions of marginalization and social justice in Assam (2017). By bringing together diverse essays, the volume offers a multifaceted analysis of governance and representation issues in the region. Through critical examination of power dynamics and socio-economic disparities, the contributors illuminate the challenges faced by marginalized communities and advocate for transformative social change.

Collectively, these scholarly works contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between political marginalization, representation, and governance in Assam, offering insights into the enduring legacies of ethnic conflict and the pathways towards inclusive and equitable governance structures.

"Politics and Society in Assam: A Study of the Election of 1978" by Amalendu Guha (1981) provides a detailed analysis of political dynamics in Assam, focusing on the 1978 state election. He explores issues of political representation, electoral politics, and governance challenges, highlighting the marginalized position of certain communities within Assamese politics.

"Governance and Politics in Assam" edited by Udayon Misra and Bijoya Misra (2015) offers a comprehensive analysis of governance and politics in Assam, addressing issues of political marginalization, identity politics, and conflict resolution. The contributors examine the role of political institutions, civil society actors, and grassroots movements in shaping the state's political landscape.

## **Land Rights and Agrarian Conflicts: Competition for Land Resources**

Land rights and agrarian conflicts have been perennial issues in many societies, including Assam, where competition for land resources often gives rise to tensions and disputes. Scholars have extensively examined the sociological dimensions of these conflicts, shedding light on the underlying causes, dynamics, and implications for governance and social justice.

One significant aspect of land rights and agrarian conflicts in Assam is the historical legacy of land tenure systems and colonial policies. British colonial rule introduced various land tenure arrangements that often favored certain groups over others, leading to inequities and injustices in land distribution (Guha, 1983). These legacies continue to shape land ownership patterns and access to resources, fueling tensions and conflicts among different communities vying for control over land.

Moreover, rapid demographic changes and urbanization have intensified competition for land resources in Assam. Population growth, migration, and industrialization have increased the demand for land, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, resulting in conflicts between agricultural communities, indigenous groups, and urban settlers (Roy, 2009). This competition for land often exacerbates existing social inequalities and marginalization, as marginalized groups struggle to assert their rights and interests in the face of encroachment and displacement.

Ethnicity and identity politics also intersect with land rights and agrarian conflicts in Assam, further complicating the socio-political landscape. Ethnic communities often perceive land as integral to their cultural identity and livelihoods, leading to conflicts over land ownership and use (Baruah & Rao, 2017). These conflicts are exacerbated by historical grievances, unequal power relations, and competing narratives of belonging, resulting in protracted disputes and violence.

In addition to ethnic tensions, economic factors play a significant role in driving agrarian conflicts in Assam. Unequal access to resources, market pressures, and changing agricultural practices contribute to land disputes between large landowners, smallholder farmers, and landless laborers (Guha, 1983). The commodification of land and agricultural produce further exacerbates inequalities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social unrest.

Efforts to address land rights and agrarian conflicts in Assam require a holistic approach that considers the socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions of these issues. Policy interventions aimed at ensuring equitable land distribution, protecting the rights of marginalized communities, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices are essential for mitigating conflicts and fostering social justice (Roy, 2009). Furthermore, initiatives to strengthen land governance, facilitate conflict resolution mechanisms, and promote inclusive decision-making processes are crucial for building peaceful and resilient communities in Assam (Baruah & Rao, 2017). By addressing the root causes of land rights and agrarian conflicts, Assam can move towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all its inhabitants

In *Land, People and Politics: Contest over Tribal Land in Northeast India* (2019), Nepram provides a thorough examination of land rights and agrarian conflicts in Northeast India, with a specific focus on Assam. Through meticulous analysis, Nepram delves into the historical struggles of tribal communities for land rights and the multifaceted impacts of land acquisition and development projects on indigenous livelihoods and identities.

In his article "Land Rights in Assam: A Historical Perspective" (2017), Gohain offers a comprehensive historical analysis of land rights issues in Assam. Gohain traces the evolution of land tenure systems and agrarian conflicts in the region, shedding light on the socio-economic implications of land alienation and displacement for marginalized communities. He emphasizes the pressing need for equitable land redistribution and land reform policies to address the injustices perpetuated by historical land tenure arrangements.

### **Economic Resources: Employment, Business Opportunities, and Development Projects**

"Industrialization and Economic Development in Assam: Issues and Challenges" edited by Dhruba Ranjan Deka (2020) examines the dynamics of industrialization and economic development in Assam, addressing issues such as employment generation, business opportunities, and the impact of development projects on local economies. The contributors analyze the socio-economic factors shaping resource distribution and access in the state.

"Unemployment in Assam: Nature, Causes, and Remedies" by J. Baruah (2016) provides an in-depth analysis of unemployment in Assam, exploring its nature, causes, and potential remedies. He examines the structural factors contributing to unemployment, including educational disparities, labor market dynamics, and the impact of globalization on employment patterns in the state.

### **Cultural Resources: Preservation of Language, Religion, and Traditional Practices**

The literature on Assam's sociopolitical landscape encompasses a range of studies examining various facets of identity politics, citizenship debates, and social movements in the region. Gogoi's article (2015) delves into the intersection of language, identity, and politics, particularly focusing on Assamese nationalism and the preservation of linguistic diversity. Nath's study (2018) explores the dynamics of religious diversity and its impact on social cohesion and conflict, emphasizing the intersection of religious identities with ethnicity and language. Baruah's book (1999) provides a comprehensive sociological analysis of the Assam Movement, highlighting the complex interplay of class interests, ethnic identities, and ideological dynamics shaping the movement and its implications for Assam's society and polity. The edited volume by Goswami and Das (2018) offers insights into citizenship debates and identity politics in Northeast India, with a specific focus on Assam, while Hussain's study (2007) critically examines the making and unmaking of the Assam Accord, analyzing its historical context, implementation challenges, and socio-political consequences. Baruah's article (2020) provides a sociological analysis of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, exploring its political implications and societal repercussions. Lastly, Saikia's study (2009) investigates the Assam Movement as a case study of ethnic politics and state formation in Northeast India, offering insights into mobilization strategies, ideological underpinnings, and socio-political consequences of the movement.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper has illuminated the intricate interplay between ethnicity, language, and power in Assam, offering a sociological perspective on identity politics in the region. We have observed how ethnicity and language serve as pivotal markers of social identity,



influencing individuals' interactions and perceptions within society. These dynamics are deeply intertwined with broader struggles for power and recognition among different social groups.

Language policies and cultural practices intersect with structures of power, shaping access to resources, opportunities, and political representation. The preservation of linguistic diversity is not only about safeguarding cultural heritage but also about asserting political agency and resisting marginalization.

Understanding the historical context and socio-economic dynamics is crucial for comprehending contemporary identity politics in Assam. Addressing historical injustices and socio-economic disparities is essential for promoting social cohesion and fostering inclusive governance.

A holistic approach is needed to address identity politics in Assam, encompassing efforts to promote cultural pluralism, linguistic diversity, and equitable representation within political institutions. Additionally, policies addressing socio-economic inequalities and historical grievances are vital for fostering social justice and reconciliation.

By recognizing the interconnectedness of ethnicity, language, and power, and addressing underlying structural inequalities, Assam can move towards a more inclusive and harmonious society where all individuals have the opportunity to shape their collective future.

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## Three-tier Panchayati Raj System in Jammu and Kashmir: Elections, Working and Effectiveness

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the recently constituted three-tier Panchayati Raj system in the erstwhile state (now a union territory) of Jammu and Kashmir. The paper makes a brief analysis of the first-time elections to all the three-tiers of panchayats, i.e., Halqa Panchayat elections of 2018, Block Development Council elections of 2019, and District Development Council elections of 2020, and looks at the level of public participation into them. This paper also examines the functions and workings of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system by mainly relying on interviews done across many districts of J&K. Furthermore this paper looks into the effectiveness of the three-tier system and the road ahead.*

**Keywords:** Jammu and Kashmir, Decentralisation, Panchayati Raj System, Elections.

### Introduction

Local governments have been part and parcel of many political systems across history and have played an important role in the matters of governance (Anderson 1928, 208-10). In India too, the history of local governments known as panchayats can be traced back to the Vedic era, when a panchayat constituted of five elders decided all the matters pertaining to village (Nadkarni, Sivanna and Lavanya 2017, 95-100). In the post-independence period, the structure and workings of the Panchayati Raj system in India varied from state to state and didn't enjoy any constitutional recognition. The onset of globalisation in the 1980s, however, revolutionised every aspect of the world, including the field of local governance. The globalisation process strongly pushed for

decentralisation as a part of good governance reforms (Treisman 2007, 1-2). This resulted in the devolution of powers, functions, and funds to local governments, which are categorised into municipalities (responsible for urban governance) and panchayats (responsible for governance in the rural areas). In India, the passing of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment by the Indian Parliament in 1992 provided a constitutional base to the panchayats (Singh 1994, 823-25). The Act called for the creation of a three-tier Panchayati Raj system at the village, block and district level and also aimed to bring a level of uniformity across states. Despite the passing of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment there still were some variations across states as the subjects of panchayats fall under the jurisdiction of states in India. Similarly, there existed a state like Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which enjoyed a special constitutional position under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and was governed by its own constitution and laws. The panchayati system, too, in J&K, was governed by its own laws and shared a long history; however, owing to various reasons the decentralisation process was not so successful in the state.

Since it joined the Union of India in 1947, J&K has been one such place in India where the decentralisation process failed to take roots due to political unrest and a lack of political will. Although the first “Panchayati Raj Act” in J&K dates back to Maharaja Hari Singh’s time, passed in 1935, the Act called for the establishment of panchayats to assist the Maharaja’s administration in the management of rural areas (Sharma 2006, 31). The Act of 1935 was revised in 1941 to expand its purview and grant some additional functions to the panchayats (Aslam 1999, 16). After the state’s accession to India in 1947, the Sheikh Abdullah-led interim government adopted the “Panchayati Act of 1951” to decentralise power and strengthen panchayats in J&K. However, before the decentralisation process could take root, the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 destabilised the entire process and created chaos in the state (Bhat 2002, 200). After adopting the state constitution in November 1956, which came into effect in January 1957, the Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad-led state government passed the “Village Panchayat Act of 1958,” calling for the creation of Halqa Panchayats and Panchayat Adalats. The Act of 1958 was even weaker compared to earlier acts and didn’t yield any significant results. After the release of Sheikh Abdullah in 1975,

he reaffirmed his commitment to the decentralisation reforms, however the process again faced roadblocks in the subsequent years.

It was only in 1989 that J&K passed a full-fledged panchayat Act for the first time. This Act was named as “Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act 1989” and called for the creation of three-tier Panchayati Raj system with Halqa Panchayat at the village level, Block Development Council at the intermediate (Block) level, and District Development and Planning Board at the Apex (District) level (Panchayati Raj Act-1989, 1-3). This Act also called for the creation of Panchayat Adalats to resolve local disputes within villages. Although the passing of this Act was a great milestone, when it came to decentralisation of power to rural governments, however, the timing of Act coincided with the outbreak of insurgency in the state, rendering its implementation impossible. Panchayati Raj has faced many challenges in J&K, and one of the major challenges among them has been holding elections to these bodies, be it due to political unrest or a lack of political will from successive state governments. The village panchayat elections in the region were held in 1967, 1978, 2001, and 2011, these elections except for 2011 didn’t attract the larger public participation (Layeeq 2016, 258-59). Similarly, elections in the past were only held for the first-tier (Halqa Panchayats), the second-tier and the third-tier remained non-constituted up to 2019–20, leaving the panchayat system ineffective.

In 2018, Halqa panchayat elections were again held under the governor-led administration and saw a voting percentage of more than 74 percent. The Halqa Panchayat elections were followed by the first-ever Block Development Council and District Development Council elections held in late 2019 and late 2020, leading to the completion of the first three-tier panchayati system in J&K. The establishment of a three- tier system heralded a new era of democracy at the grassroots level. This also offered new avenues and opportunities for the government to empower local democratic institutions so that they could initiate the long-pending developmental works in the villages and transform the lives of rural masses. This paper essentially tries to look into the constitution and workings of this three-tier panchayati system in J&K and examine its different aspects.

## Halqa Panchayat Elections-2018

Section 4 of the J&K Panchayati Raj Act 1989 calls for the establishment of Halqa Panchayats in every village, consisting of a sarpanch and not less than seven or more than eleven panchs (Panchayati Raj Act-1989, 8). As already stated, the panchayat elections in J&K have often been dependent on the security situation and the will of ruling parties. That's why these elections were often not held on time. Halqa panchayats in J&K that were constituted in 2011 completed their term in the summer of 2016. Although fresh elections to panchayats were due, the large-scale civilian unrest in the summer of 2016 made it completely impossible to hold one (The Hindu, 2016). These elections were postponed until November 2018 because of the continuous political uncertainty that emerged due to the collapse of alliance government run by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in J&K (Economic Times, 2018). While both the state assembly and local democratic institutions stood dissolved, the governor's administration, after seeing a little improvement in the situation, approved the election schedule for both the municipalities and panchayats to restore local-level democracy in the region (Indian Express, 2018). The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of J&K subsequently released a detailed schedule for the panchayat elections on November 16, 2018. As the situation was still tense and holding elections was still a challenge, the CEO categorised 687 panchayats as hypersensitive in the region where holding elections was a challenge.

The elections for the 4483 Halqa Panchayats were conducted from November 17 to December 11 in a total of nine phases. A total of 58, 54208 electorates were eligible to exercise their franchise to elect 4,483 sarpanchs and 35,029 panchs. Amidst a deteriorating security scenario and poll boycotts from the two main regional parties, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) and the PDP, the state witnessed an overall voting percentage of 74%; however, the voting percentage in the Kashmir region was as low as around 41% (Scroll, 2018). In Kashmir, out of 2135 Halqas, 699 saw no opposition candidate, and no candidate stood for 708 Halqas, therefore remaining vacant. The elections saw a positive response from Jammu and Ladakh regions, both in terms of contestation and participation. The two main regional parties in the state JKNC and PDP

stayed away from the polls over the issue of Article 35A, which allowed the state assembly to define the permanent residents of J&K and prohibits the non-permanent from buying immovable property or take government jobs etc. These parties asked the central government to clear its stand on the article 35-A and also take various measures for its protection (Indian Express, 2018). These elections however were significant in many ways as they were able to restore some kind of democratic order at the ground level, which led to initiation of developmental process in the rural areas. The state administration subsequently started to make preparations to hold elections for the second tier of the panchayati system at the block level.

### **Block Development Council Elections-2019**

Section 27 of the J&K Panchayati Raj Act 1989 calls for the constitution of a Block Development Councils (BDCs) for each block bearing its name. The BDCs shall consist of a chairperson and all sarpanchs of the block. The chairperson of the BDC has to be elected by the panchs and sarpanchs of the block among themselves. The BDC should also elect a vice-chairperson among themselves, and the Block Development Officer should function as secretary of the BDC. Throughout history, the second tier of panchayats was never constituted, and the panchayati system remained confined to the villages. However, the first ever BDC elections were held in J&K after its special status was removed in August 2019 and the state was divided into two union territories (UTs), i.e., the UT of Jammu and Kashmir and the UT of Ladakh. Elections were held simultaneously in both newly constituted UTs. The J&K government also granted 33% reservation to women and to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on their population ratio in the second tier (Daily Excelsior, 2019). The reservation for women and other marginalised sections was earlier limited to the first tier only. The polls were held for 310 blocks, with 1065 candidates in the fray; 27 candidates were elected unopposed, and the overall voting percentage was more than 98% (Chief Electoral Officer, 2019).

Like Halqa Panchayat elections of 2018, BDC polls were also boycotted by the major political parties in the region, like the NC, PDP, and Congress, as a protest against the downgrading of the



region's status and detention of political leaders. Although the BDC elections saw a huge voter turnout of around 98% in total, the decision of major political parties to boycott them was not a good sign from the perspective of democracy. The elections were mostly fought by independent candidates, who won about 217 seats; most of them were covertly supported by the regional parties (Times of India, 2019). Among the political parties, the BJP won 81 seats, which was the largest number any political party bagged. The holding of BDC polls was a milestone in itself, as it laid a solid foundation for grassroots democracy in the J&K. After holding the successful BDC elections, which saw a larger participation even in the Kashmir region, the government subsequently started to prepare for the elections to the third-tier at the district level.

### **District Development Council Elections and Panchayat By-Elections-2020**

The constitution of panchayats at all three levels (village, block, and district) is necessary for a vibrant grassroots democracy. Despite the removal of the special status of J&K and downgrading it into a Union Territory in August-2019, the Panchayati Raj system in the UT continues to be governed by the Act of 1989. According to Section 45 of the original J&K Panchayati Raj Act 1989, there shall be a District Development and Planning Board at the apex of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system in each district. However, in late 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs made Amendments to the Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 by adding many new chapters. These changes substituted the District Development and Planning Boards with District Development Councils (DDC) to be constituted in each district (S.O-216, 2020). The Deputy Commissioners were directed by the central government to divide the DDC area into 14 single-member territorial constituencies. The DDC members were to be directly elected by the voters, whereas the chairperson and vice chairperson were to be elected indirectly by the DDC members among themselves. The new rules also ensured proper reservation for women, SCs, and STs, so that every section of the population is properly represented (Times of India, 2021). After constituting the panchayats at the halqa and block levels, the government of J&K, UT, began preparations for constituting the third tier of the panchayat system at the district level. The office of the CEO J&K

subsequently came up with the poll schedule in November 2020 for DDCs and Halqa Panchayats, which remained vacant in 2018 due to political uncertainty.

The first ever District Development Council (DDC) polls in J&K and panchayat elections were subsequently held in November and December of 2020. The elections for the DDC saw a voter turnout of around 52% (Chief Electoral Officer, 2020). Elections were held for a total of 280 seats, out of which the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), which consists of seven political parties: NC, PDP, CPI (M), People's Conference, etc., won around 109 seats, while the BJP won about 74 seats (Indian Express, 2020). The elections for the vacant panchayat seats were simultaneously held, and the voting percentage remained more or less the same as at the DDC polls. The DDC and Panchayat By-Elections, as usual, saw a low turnout in the Kashmir region compared to Jammu, where a large number of people participated. Some districts of Kashmir, like Pulwama, witnessed as low as 6.7% voting, with the Kashmir region witnessing an overall vote of 40% (The Wire, 2020). The voting percentage for the DDC elections across J&K remained around 52%. The holding of DDC elections was another feat; this made a three-tier system functional for the first time in J&K. These elections became further meaningful because it was the first election after the abrogation of Article 370, in which regional political parties participated.

### **Working and Effectiveness of the Three-tier Panchayati Raj System since 2018**

The local governments, including the panchayats, have assumed greater roles since their constitution in 2019, when it comes to the planning, development and service delivery to the citizens at the local level. The setting up of a three-tier panchayati system for the first time has given a new push to the decentralisation process in the J&K. The central government and J&K administration undertook various measures for the effective devolution of powers and funds to these panchayats. The 27 functions pertaining to governance were transferred to panchayats, and the government also made efforts to train PRI's in digital literacy and plan formulation (Cross Town News, 2022). When it came to the formulation and approval of developmental plans, the

panchayat bodies were fully empowered at all three levels to frame and pass the plans with or without modifications. A sarpanch from Bandipora district said, “Whenever we have to pass the development plans for the panchayat, we call for the Gram Sabha meeting and invite all the citizens to attend it and offer their suggestions or put forward their demands; all plans are formulated after proper consultation”.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, another sarpanch from District Ganderbal stated, “The panchayats now enjoy sufficient powers when it comes to formulation and implementation of policies and programs”.<sup>2</sup> “The panchayats in the last few years have been given exclusive powers over issues ranging from governance to environmental protection. The panchayats have been able to do a lot of work in the villages, i.e., construction of footpaths, roads, irrigation canals, washrooms, protection walls, and the installation of dustbins, and they have also looked after the issues of healthcare, education, and drinking water in the past few years” said a sarpanch from Anantnag, etc.<sup>3</sup> The existence of the BDC and the DDC, on the other hand, has further strengthened the Panchayati system; they not only guide the Halqa Panchayats in the matters of plan formulation and governance but also act as channels to the higher corridors of power. A BDC chairperson interviewed in Ganderbal said, “There has been a lot of transformation in the past few years, the public had to visit the MLAs even for the smallest of demands, but now the people come to panchayat representatives, who are better able to solve their problems on time”.<sup>4</sup> “The formation of a three-tier system has empowered the panchayat representatives, and they are better able to address public issues by holding government officials accountable at all three levels, which was not the case earlier,” said a women DDC member from District Bandipora.<sup>5</sup> The government has also organised capacity-building and training sessions for the panchayat representatives and sent them on exposure tours outside the state at a cost of 70 crore so that the representatives at all three tiers can be trained in the matters of local government (Government Order No: 281-RD and PR of 2022).

The J&K administration has also ensured the necessary funds for each panchayat. Under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the panchayats in J&K received around Rs 4000 crore from 2018 to 2022 (Ministry of Rural Development, 2022). Similarly each panchayat in J&K received amounts ranging from 40 lakh to 50 lakh rupees per

year under the various plans, including the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission. In the year 2022–23 alone, the government granted 1000 crore to 4200 Halqa Panchayats, 72 crore to 285 blocks, with each BDC getting an amount of 25 lakhs and 200 crore to DDCs, with each DDC getting an amount of 10 crore (Rising Kashmir, 2022). Additionally, an amount of 10 lakh rupees was provided to each panchayat under the public outreach programme “Back to Village” which was specially meant to develop rural infrastructure and solve public problems (Government Order No. 247-FD of 2020). The government also granted 10 lakh rupees to the 285 most backward panchayats under the “Aspirational Panchayat Development Programme” with the aim of developing these panchayats on modern lines in J&K (APDP, 2022). A sarpanch interviewed in District Anantnag stated, “There are enough funds available to panchayats, and at times we fail to utilise all of them”.<sup>6</sup> Another sarpanch interviewed in Ganderbal District said, “The government has ensured sufficient funds for panchayats under various schemes, and this has helped us carry out a lot of developmental work in the villages”.<sup>7</sup> A former sarpanch interviewed in Anantnag District said, “Compared to earlier terms, the panchayats nowadays have a lot of financial resources available and are better able to carry out developmental works with the backing of the government”.<sup>8</sup>

There has also been a significant change in the approach of bureaucrats towards the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), earlier they were accused of hindering the decentralisation process along with the political leaders. The bureaucrats are now facilitating the devolution of powers, funds, and functions to the panchayat, as there are strong directions from the J&K administration and central government. When asked about the attitude of government officials towards panchayat representatives, a sarpanch interviewed in District Bandipora said, “The administration, especially the deputy commissioner, is very cooperative and always solves our problems on priority”.<sup>9</sup> The higher officials are also ensuring that various government officials and departments remain accountable to the public. The panchayat representatives for the first time in the post-independence period were given formal protocol to unfurl the national Flag on Independence Day and formal position in the warrant of precedence (Rising Kashmir, 2022). The new rules placed the status of DDC chairpersons above that of Member Parliaments (MPs), Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and Chief Secretaries within their respective territorial jurisdictions, and the MPs and

MLAs were not to be members of DDC as was the case in District Planning and Development Boards (Greater Kashmir, 2021). The process of transparency and accountability has also increased in PRIs in the last few years. The government has also strictly directed the officials to maintain transparency in the utilisation of panchayat funds, maintain proper accounts of expenditures, and ensure no funds should lapse (Kashmir Dispatch, 2023). The government has also switched to e-services and direct benefit transfer systems so that citizens can directly access services and benefit directly from them under schemes like MGNREGA. Similarly, increased public participation in panchayats has led to the promotion of accountability and answerability. A local resident interviewed in Ganderbal district said, “Whenever the local panchayat has to formulate the Gram Panchayat Development Plan, we are invited to give our suggestions; this also enables us later to hold the panchayat representatives accountable”.<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The formation of a three-tier Panchayati Raj system in J&K has immensely boosted grassroots democracy and governance in the past few years. The three-tier system has also led to the promotion of coordination between all three levels of panchayat representatives and helped to hold the various departments accountable. There have also been some serious efforts from the government to not only strengthen these institutions but also to promote a sense of security among panchayat representatives by taking various measures. The rural areas in J&K are now on the path of peace, progress and development and PRIs have played an important role in this transformation. Although the panchayat system has been effective in the past few years, there still continue to be issues around the level of public participation, both direct and indirect. Secondly, the panchayat elections at the halqa and block level were boycotted by the main regional political parties, which is not a good sign for a healthy democracy. There also have been concerns about PRIs being instruments for implementing the centrally sponsored schemes and not as units of local self-government, especially in times when the J&K continues to be under the president's rule. Likewise the women, despite reservations, continue to be disempowered; at places, they have been put up as proxy candidates, and the real powers continue to be exercised by the men (Agarwal, 2023).

Similarly, there continue to be claims about the quality of work carried out by the panchayats, as allegations often appear about the substandard material being used by the contractors in collaboration with the local panchayat representatives.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>. Anonymous (Sarpanch), interviewed by author on June-20, 2023, District-Bandipora.
- <sup>2</sup>. Anonymous (Sarpanch), interviewed by author on August-24, 2023, District-Ganderbal.
- <sup>3</sup>. Anonymous (Sarpanch), interviewed by the author on November-3, 2023, District-Anantnag.
- <sup>4</sup>. Anonymous (BDC Chairperson), interviewed by author on July-5, 2023, District-Ganderbal.
- <sup>5</sup>. Anonymous (DDC Member), interviewed by the author on June-26, 2023, District-Ganderbal.
- <sup>6</sup>. Anonymous (Sarpanch), interviewed by author on November-5, 2023, District-Anantnag.
- <sup>7</sup>. Anonymous (Sarpanch), interviewed by author on July-11, 2023, District-Ganderbal.
- <sup>8</sup>. Anonymous (Ex-Sarpanch), interviewed by author on November-6, 2023, District-Anantnag.
- <sup>9</sup>. Anonymous (Sarpanch), interviewed by author on July-18, 2023, District-Bandipora.
- <sup>10</sup>. Anonymous (Citizen), Interviewed by author on August-22, 2023, District-Ganderbal.

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## Surjapuri Students from Kishanganj District: Academic Achievement, Social Support, and Achievement Motivation

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### Abstract

*Class X Surjapuri children enrolled in government-aided schools in the Kishanganj District of Bihar were the subjects of the current study, which aimed to investigate academic accomplishment, achievement motivation, and social support accessible to them. Surjapuri ethnic group, with their unique dialect, way of life, and culture, is mostly found in northeastern Bihar, as well as certain areas of West Bengal, Nepal, and Bangladesh. For a long time, raising student's academic achievement has been a difficult issue for educational officials and the school system. While some researchers focus on increasing social support to boost academic performance, others state that students learn best when students themselves are genuinely interested in learning.*

**Keywords:** Social Support, Surjapuri Students, Kishanganj District, Academic Achievement

### Introduction

Bihar Caste Based Survey, 2023 reported that the total Surjapuri population in Bihar is 2446212, which is 1.87% of the total population of Bihar. This community is economically backward, has a low literacy rate, and is orthodox (Alam, 2015, p5). Original inhabitants of this Seemanchal Bihar region who speak Surjapuri dialects as a medium of communication are referred to as the Surjapuri community. The Surjapuri language recognized by the government of Bihar as a special dialect is a mixture of Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Maithili, Rajbangsi, Oriya, and Nepali. The Surjapuri community includes both Muslims and Hindus. Muslims are the initial settlers in the region constituting 71% and the remaining 29% are Hindus. Usually, the naming of an area is done after the name of the ruler, population, historical or mythological events, etc. and the case could be the same with the name Surjapuri pragana but no evidence is in hand. It is tough to depict from where the Surjapuri nomenclature came, but it is assumed that the Surya dynasty ruled the Mithila region and the area of Surjapuri pragana was under this Mithila region, so the people of this region started

calling themselves Surjapuri. It may also be possible that King Aditya Sur of the Sur dynasty extended his ruling influence on this area, so it is said that the name Surjapuri came from this Surya. It is also possible that the Surjapuri community lived as a tribe in ancient times and the tribe used to worship the Sun (Surya) so the nomenclature Surjapuri would have come from the 'Surya' (Singha, 2023, p23). The word Surjapuri refers to the Suryapur kingdom mentioned in the Mahabharata and the Puranas, which spread across the parts of Bengal, Bihar, Assam, and Nepal regions in ancient times. The Surjapuri people are highly influenced by the Bengali culture. Surjapuri is a medium of communication that has no script in existence. Folk songs are heard by both men and women and are sung on special occasions and seasons. Kishanganj is the mainland of Surjapuris which has a beautiful culture with cultural diversity and religious harmony, peaceful living, and secular nature of people which make the region different from other regions of Bihar. There is religious diversity and huge differences in culture and traditions but they follow the distinct Surjapuri culture and traditional lifestyle of the region and live together for a long time. The Surjapuri people have a tradition of wearing of saris and blouses for women and lungis and kurtas for men irrespective of their religion. Women are ornaments-loving and that too those ornaments which are made of silver and gold. They make up ornament in festivals like Eid, Durgapuja, Diwali, and other special occasions such as marriage, and local mela, and also organized by the society. The community celebrates and enjoys all major festivals of Muslims and Hindus in harmony. Surjapuri Development Organization and Surjapuri Vikas Morcha are the non-political outfits that work for the issues and welfare of the Surjapuri-speaking people, including Muslims and Hindus (Raj, 2024, p5). Among the Surjapuri people Muslims are concentrated in rural areas and the urban area is a mixture of both Hindus and Muslims, both with different religious faiths have a common feature that unites them is their Surjapuri identity (Kumar, 2024, p2). The Surjapuri community never fought for their identity. However, the community lives in an area where several movements are going on for their identities like the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling, the Kamtapuri movement in Coochbehar, and the Naxal movement in Naxalbari of West Bengal. Now the Surjapuri community with distinct ethnic identity is fighting for their inclusion in the central government list for OBC though the community has been recognized as a socio-economically backward community by the Bihar state government.

Social support and achievement motivation play a critical role in a student's life as they contribute toward the student's academic achievement. Despite knowing the significant attributions, studies however have not examined the relationship among achievement motivation, social support, and academic achievement of class X in the context of Surjapuri students of Kishanganj district, Bihar. The present study, using a sample of 1600 class X Surjapuri students from the Kishanganj district, found a positive relationship between achievement motivation level, social support available, and academic achievement of class X Surjapuri students from the Kishanganj district.

Like cognitive factors, non-cognitive factors not only directly influence the student's learning ability but also indirectly influence the academic performance of the students. Research studies conducted so far found a positive relationship between a parent's active involvement in academic activities in the form of social support and the academic performance of their children. Though many parents do not get directly involved or assist with specific areas of knowledge or skill with their children, they may still have an important role in stimulating the sense of competence of their children and developing a positive attitude towards academics. Family members highly affect the various school outcomes when developing and maintaining positive motivation among the children. Parents have high expectations from their children and that's why leave no stone unturned to invest in the capacity building of their children in terms of knowledge, attitude, and skills. In this connection, such parents constantly encourage curiosity, and creativity in their children, which in turn may help in the development of achievement motivation. It was also found that some factors create obstacles for the parents in supporting their children like some parents struggling with low or no education, financial constraints, stress, time constraints, or even unknown roles to be played by themselves.

Several school-level reforms have been initiated to reduce the achievement gap between high- and low-income families, advantaged and disadvantaged community students belonging to different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, or even normal children and children with special needs (NEP 2020, p24). This gap appears from the beginning when the children start schooling and persist with students throughout their school life which can be observed in their performance in the board exam they take. Many research studies were also conducted on the gap in achievement between the socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged society. This achievement gap manifests

between the cognitive and non-cognitive skills which are also known as soft skills. These soft skills are very important for success in school life. While starting school, students from socio-economically disadvantaged families have less non-cognitive skills and thus lag behind the advantaged students. This fact does not mean that students from disadvantaged societies have a skill gap and less educational motivation but in fact, such students do not get good opportunities and even their parents may not provide a conducive environment for education. Children from marginalized societies need support and a variety of opportunities to be integrated with a group of children from well-to-do families. It is seen that in the surjapuri community, only a few parents concentrate on the education or achievement of their children, and then no good care is taken while children are studying at the level of secondary or higher education. Hence, most of the research conducted is limited to the children's primary educational achievement. However, secondary education needs more attention from the parents Surjapuri community is not only one of the disadvantaged communities of Bihar but also reveals the educational backwardness of the community.

### **Surjapuri Students and Academic Achievement**

The academic performance of the students occupies the central position in the entire education system. The level of academic performance of the students may be regarded as the measure/index of success and failure of any student or group of students or even the educational institutions. Parents and educational institutions have high expectations of good academic performance of the students because they have a firm belief that good marks/grades lead to a good future in terms of job opportunities available around. Academic performance is the knowledge/skill earned by students in the form of marks or grade scores assigned by the teachers. In an academic context, academic performance refers to the educational motives to be achieved by the teachers, students, and educational institutions above a convinced level and is calculated by adding both the marks gained through the continuous assessment and final exams in an academic year. The term academic achievement is made of two words i.e. academic and achievement. Academic refers to an institution or school where a particular type of training or instruction is given in a specific manner and the term 'achievement' refers to the accomplishment and successful performance of the task

by the students. Academic achievement can be assessed in various forms and many ways like grades or percentage of marks in school examinations. The motive of getting more academic marks may differ from person to person or even from person to organization. In the educational context, academic achievement is the acquisition of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domain-related changes in human behavior, and in the school context academic achievement is the student's achievement in the subjects under study. Academic achievement is always considered an important aspect of students' lives as those scores decide the fate of every student in the field of further education or the job market. Hence from the very beginning in schools, academic achievement is emphasized.

### **Surjapuri Students and Achievement Motivation**

Achievement motivation refers to the inner drive, urge, or desire of an individual to achieve performance excellence. The term can be understood by explaining the words achievement and motivation separately. The dictionary meaning of the word achievement is to "perform successfully" or simply achievement means performance. It is a lifelong process for adolescents due to its relations with new roles, responsibilities, academics, and careers, which is calculated as the level of the attainment of set goals by an individual. Motivation has also been defined as the stimulus of actions toward a special objective that has had little or no attention previously or it simply refers to the drive to achieve target goals. However, it is influenced by some factors like the school environment, the internal conditions of a person, and the goal of individual behavior. Thus, achievement motivation is the expectation of getting satisfaction in doing challenging tasks but in the field of education, it refers to excellence which changes with time and grade (Falikah, Nuryana, Yuliana, and Akhmad, 2020, p3109). It is an acquired and learned tendency that can be enhanced by certain interventions. It is also referred to as the "need for achievement" which is concerned with individual effort, aspirations, and persistence but due to relatively permanent characteristics of personality, it can be considered as a trait. Achievement motivation may also be related to an instrumental aspect of human behavior, however, in general, it has strong connections with affective (feeling) and cognitive (preferences) aspects. Achievement motivation is a multiple construct having the ability, self-concept, task values, goals, and achievement motive. A person's

life satisfaction is closely connected with achievement motivation and the person with high life satisfaction always performs better in comparison to those who do not have it in an educational setting. Present generations of students are required to generate a higher degree of achievement motivation for success in the field of academics. Achievement motivation can be fostered by proper training in a conducive atmosphere in a family, schools, and society. It is also individual-specific as it differs from individual to individual. The degree of motivation may further be influenced by several other factors associated with the students. This internal phenomenon called the human motivation level arises mainly from two sources, i.e. internal and external. Arousal of achievement motivation due to internal enjoyment in the given task itself is an example of an internal source, otherwise, it is external when arises from outside towards the person like incentives, educational gifts, rewards of good academic grades, or the form of praise by teachers and parents, etc. Achievement motivation that comes from the source of the environment is connected to the attainment of approval from parents, teachers, and peers. Parents sharing their high expectations with their children also plays a significant role in the development of achievement motivation. Both cognitive and affective factors play a very important role in the development of achievement motivation. An individual's close emotional contact (like parents, and peers) with the environment has a high impact on the development of an individual struggling for achievement. Those getting rewards, reinforcement, and support from parents and peers have been found to have higher levels of achievement motivation (Reski, Yusuf, & Kiram, 2018, p534) Parents need to be very affectionate and emotionally attached to their children in listening to their problems, which need to be solved because achievement motivation is greatly influenced by parents' behavior. Achievement motivation is a combined factor of desire for attainment and fear of failure. An individual's past experiences and his/her personality have a mixture of both components. Consequently, there are personal differences in choosing the level of difficulty of the task. For instance, an individual who has a high level of achievement motivation for attainment and a low level of fear of failure chooses realistic and difficult tasks, and an individual who has a low level of achievement motivation for attainment and a high level of fear of failure chooses a lower-level task which is not realistic and has a low chance of attaining goals To improve students' academic achievement, it is necessary to develop their achievement motivation. So, the



environment of family and school should be made conducive enough to enhance the level of achievement motivation among the students. Various psychologists think that motivation has an integral relationship with new learning, skills, competencies, behavior strategies, etc. and motivation is one of the prime indicators for academic achievement. Motivation for academic achievement is characterized by behavior that produces learning and achievement. To stimulate the level of motivation among slow learners has always been a big challenge, especially for teachers and institutions. In an academic context achievement motivation is said to be the responsible behavior of a student in an achievement situation. A close relationship between academic achievement and achievement motivation is well documented in several empirical studies reporting students with high achievement motivation have high academic achievement and vice versa. Achievement motivation as an important indicator of academic performance, has drawn the attention of researchers focusing on the relationship between academic achievement and achievement motivation. Attainment of achievement requires not only intelligence but also motivation and support in an academically congenial environment (Nyicyor, Chetia & Dutta, 2016, p 1435). So, having a high degree of achievement motivation is a must for the attainment of the desired degree of academic success among students.

### **Surjapuri Students and Social Support**

According to Barnes and Duck (1994 p175), social support refers to “everyday behaviors that, whether directly or indirectly, communicate to an individual that she or he is valued and cared for by others.” So, social support is ‘both verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship and functions to enhance the perception of personal control in one's experience’. Although social support helps reduce stressful situations, Barnes and Duck stated that the exchange of support does not only happen during the period of crisis but also in day-to-day basis interactions in personal relationships. The present study adopted the definition of social support as everyday supportive interactions because these everyday interactions constitute the base for the support exchanged during crises. Usually, social support comprises two basic qualities, a. perceptions that available persons can offer as a piece of advice, emotional sustenance, information, and material resources;

and b. functionality as an aid that enhances the achievement of important developmental and daily goals. Further, Korte and Simonsen (2018, p100) categorized social support as informative, instrumental, emotional, and appraisal. Giving information advice and guidance may be categorized under informative support as this also helps the person to understand and overcome difficult situations. Instrumental support comes in the form of tangible or material aid to people in society. It includes helping with material items like money, gifts, time, and other donations or resources. Emotional support refers to relationships and interactions in a social network in which the person feels valued, appreciated, accepted, and loved in times of need, care, and distress. Emotional social support refers the feelings, trust, and empathy. Lastly, appraisal support stands for the perceived availability of someone to talk to about one's problems, giving compliments, and information that is useful for self-evaluation.

The House and Wells model (1978, p49) measured social support from sources like supervisors/bosses, colleagues (coworkers), spouses (wife and husband) friends, and other relatives. For Class X Surjapuri students, social support may come from parents, teachers, friends, and immediate neighbors or in a broad sense from the social network the students belong to. Social support may be seen in a tangible form or even in the form of emotions. Students who receive instrumental support from their teachers do better in their assigned academic tasks and other activities. Peer support is an important support that adolescents mainly get from their circle, and this support is more important in high school period. During this risk period, students' perceived support from primary sources of parents and teachers worked wonders. Social support from informal sources like parents, siblings, and friends is regarded as more trustworthy and reliable than other sources. Social support becomes a crucial factor in enhancing the student's academic achievement and removing emotional exhaustion (Li, Han, Wang, Sun, and Cheng, 2018, p120). It is widely believed to have relations with the sound development of an individual for instance; social support from parents and peers reduces psychological stress and helps in the individual's well-being. Social support has a great role in improving the quality of life and mental health by assisting people to get appreciated, accepted, and connected with the social network (Alsubaie, Stain, Webster & Wadman, 2019, p484). Social support develops a sense of trust, confidence,

safety feeling, and security, which in turn plays an important role in permitting the students to take risks, accept mistakes, ask for help along with learning.

Social support is a social network that includes social resources and assets organized in an informal way to support the person in need. It includes both material-oriented support and enthusiastic emotional support from society. Generally, people count on those who are available, and accessible for help or from whom they get respect in society. Social support attracts researchers from different disciplines of study, which proposed a few heterogeneous definitions. Based on several definitions of social support available to us, we can categorize social support according to its dimensions. Socially embedded social support is the relationship of persons in a social environment making the social network an infrastructure of social support. Perceived social support may be defined as support available to the person in the form of psychological or cognitive relations with support, on the contrary, enacted social support is termed as the performance of the people's actions when they avail assistance or in other words, received social support offered in a time of need. Social support may be regarded as an important factor for overcoming the risks and challenges of students' psychological problems, educational issues, and withdrawal from educational institutions (Tinajero, López, Rodríguez, and Páramo 2020, p134). It is however important to understand the critical distinctions between constructs like social networks, social integration, social capital, and social support. Although social support arises from members of the social network in which individuals belong, the mere existence of a social network does not guarantee the provision of social support. Social support emerges from substantial assistance by others in the form of either informational, emotional, material, or companionship needs which is recognized as support by both the provider and the recipient.

### **Educational Implications of the study**

This study has some practical implications for parents, teachers, policymakers, and educational policymakers as listed below:

1. It provides significant information about the importance of maximizing social support to be received by the students.

2. Different stakeholders of education should realize how essential it is to guarantee the availability of sufficient social support to every student which in turn would result in better academic performance.
3. Efforts must be made to enhance both the level and quality of social support (both academic and non-academic) available to the students.
4. Developing an understanding of the connectedness of these concepts of social support, academic achievement, and achievement motivation may help many parties, such as teachers, govt, parents, counselors, and psychologists to design and develop proper intervention programs to enhance achievement motivation as well as social support among the students.

## Conclusions

It may be summarized that school students occupy an important part of any educational institute and society, and hence supporting them in maintaining their mental health, and physical health is the prime objective of educational institutions and society. Social support and motivation level play a major role in education; therefore, efforts should be made to support them in the field of education from various sources like parents, teachers, peer groups, govt. agency, NGO, etc. Based on the findings of the study, students need to be supported to overcome academic difficulties and challenges for their academic success and there mainly comes the role of the teachers in supporting the child. A few schemes and programs have been started to help students from socio-economic backgrounds who have low academic achievement. However, the findings of this study reveal that the Surjapuri students have average to below average to no social support for education based on their gender, area of residence, and socio-economic status. So, the different stakeholders of education need to join hands together and pay special attention to the students appearing in the first board exam belonging to the Surjapuri community.

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## Education System of Punjab under the Sikh rule (1799- 1839)

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### Abstract:

*Education can be a powerful tool for overcoming poverty and enhancing one's economic and social status. It also enables individuals to reflect on themselves, society, and the state. Contrary to the misconception that pre-British Punjab was populated by uneducated people and lacked a formal education system, this paper aims to explore the educational framework under Sikh rule, particularly during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's era. The paper will briefly examine Maharaja Ranjit Singh's educational policies and provide insights into his liberal and generous approach towards his subjects, especially Muslims, highlighting his dedication to providing educational opportunities. Despite lacking formal education himself, Maharaja Ranjit Singh recognized its importance. By closely examining his educational policies, we can understand whether the facilities he provided were effective in maximizing their potential.*

**Keywords:** Muslims, Schools, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh Rule, Religion, Education.

A compassionate state must ensure freedom of religion, equal opportunities in economic and educational endeavors, the fair administration of justice, and the security of life and property. Minorities, in particular, seek to preserve their religious identity while enjoying the same services available to other residents. Although Maharaja Ranjit Singh was unable to pursue a formal education, his intellect allowed him to comprehend both the issues of the people and the government. Because of his astute disposition, he was able to solve any issue pertaining to state affairs and made the greatest choices for his state. (Prinsep, 1834, 178) Persian remained to hold the status of a court language throughout his era, thus he did not attempt to change the system as it was already in place. However, he strived to simplify and make his state's administration more transparent. This approach never hindered the conduct of state affairs. (Grewal, 1980, 11) Throughout his reign, he gave unwavering support to public education, and as a result, numerous schools were opened for the benefit of the people of Punjab, and these schools were run by the

best academicians of the day. According to G.W. Leitner's History of Indigenous education in Punjab, "religious education in Punjab was provided free of cost to all whether male or female." About 4,000 schools were reportedly created to meet the demands of every community. (Punjabi Spot) Additionally, he mentioned that religious education was provided free of cost to both men and women, (Leitner, 1882, 72) the wealthy class of society used to pay teachers for their children's education and had their own private schools. In order to teach the kids of upper strata at their homes, several teachers were employed. The most revered individuals were the teachers. The rich residents of the community were given the task of facilitating the teachers with all necessary arrangements. Along with teaching them to read and write, teachers also had a duty to instill moral values in their charges. (Leitner, 1882, 79) Leitner, a well-known academic, played a crucial part in both the founding of Punjab University and the building of Government College in Lahore. Leitner's 1882 publication provides valuable insights into the various types of schools that existed in Punjab during the Sikh era. He notes that every religious institution, whether a mosque, dharmshala, temple, or Gurdwara, had an attached school primarily dedicated to religious education. He provides the most minute details about the school locations, the qualifications of the teachers, their salaries, the number of students in different schools, etc. (Leitner, 1882, 82) In 1860, there were 576 active schools with 4226 instructors, according to the Lahore District report. The schools often had a religious outlook and were associated with gurdwaras, mosques, and temples. Ranjit Singh provided substantial support to the administrators of these schools. Nearly every mosque, *dharamshala*, and gurdwara had an associated school. Muslim schools and madrassas operated successfully and independently of state interference, allowing Muslim students complete freedom to pursue their academic interests and progress in life and society. These institutions were typically located in villages and focused on the religious education of young people (Fauja Singh & A. C Arora, 1984, p. 303). Maharaja Ranjit Singh also promoted modern educational reforms, encouraging English learning in the later part of his reign. There is evidence that he employed a Christian instructor to establish English-medium schools in Lahore, though these schools were prohibited from promoting Christianity or teaching the Bible. While British missionaries were allowed to preach in other parts of Punjab, the Maharaja did not permit them to establish Christian schools. British Christian missionaries were also welcomed in the Sikh kingdoms of Nabha, Jind,



Kapurthala, and Faridkot in addition to Patiala. (Goulding, 1924, 106-107) Muslims and Hindus, on the other hand, were both permitted to pursue both religious and vocational education. Most of the court's Sikh sardars were educated particularly Engineer and mathematician Lehna Singh. (Fauja Singh & A.C Arora, 1984, 307) Under the guidance of the renowned Akhvand Ali, who was particularly summoned from the Frontier to Lahore, Kunwar Nau Nihal Singh, Ajit Singh, and Lehna Singh studied the higher ideas of mathematics and astronomy. Attar Singh, Lehna Singh, and Ajit Singh were all proficient in Arabic. (Fauja Singh & A.C Arora, 1984, 312) There was no standard or organized method of instruction. Education was provided according to necessity. For instance, Persian was the official language, the language of literature, and it was necessary to learn Persian in order to land an executive position. As a result, Persian was regularly taught in many schools, and 37.0% of students studied both Persian and Urdu or Nagri. (Dawn News, 577448) Persian, Sanskrit, Arabic, and Gurmukhi were crucial languages for both employment and religious education. It is evident that around 7 percent of the population learned Hindi in the final days of the Lahore Khalsa Darbar, and in the years preceding 1857, they had an excellent educational system that far surpassed what the British offered. These institutions were inclusive, admitting students regardless of caste or creed (Dawn News, 577448). Particularly astonishing is the fact that women were often more educated than men, and literacy rates increased annually (Dawn News, 577448). Schools ranged from primary to higher education, including patshalas, which were primarily for Hindus but open to other sects and taught Sanskrit for religious purposes; Gurmukhi schools for Sikh students; maktabas, which were Persian schools open to all sects; and mahajani schools for the trading or economic community (Fauja Singh & A.C Arora, 1984, p. 303). Dr. Leitner noted that education in mosques was prevalent from the early days of Islam and continued during the Sikh era. In their houses, moulvis, or educated women, operated schools with a majority of Muslim instructors. (Leitner, 1882, 53) The syllabus included Nizami's Sikandar Nama and the letters of Abul Fazal (Leitner, 1882, p. 56). Classic works such as Gulistan, Boostan, and the writings of Saadi were standard courses (Leitner, 1882, p. 305). These schools were designed to offer education ranging from primary levels, focusing on reading Arabic, to advanced levels, concentrating on reading and comprehending Arabic texts, particularly those on medicine. (Leitner, 1882, 308) Nearly all of the village's schools were tied to its mosque, temples, and

gurdwaras, where land was provided without charge. Before annexation, Punjab had a higher prevalence of elementary and sometimes advanced oriental classical and vernacular education (Leitner, 1882, p. 97). Estimates suggest that there were approximately 330,000 students in Punjab studying various subjects in Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit in schools and colleges. Lahore, in particular, was a center of educational activity, boasting a large number of schools, students, and teachers. Subjects such as oriental literature, oriental law, logic, philosophy, and medicine were taught to high standards (Administrative Report of Punjab 1849-50, p. 02). In Lahore alone, there were 576 schools with a total enrollment of 4,225 students, according to the administrative reports of Punjab for 1849-50 and 1850-51 (Leitner, 1882, p. 37). Schools were also present in other regions of the province. The student-to-school ratio was also noted as significant. Leitner mentioned that the Hoshiarpur district had one school for every 1,965 male students, as per the Settlement Report from 1852. Punjab's educational system was essentially free. (Leitner, 1882, 26) The curriculum and textbooks used in schools were influenced by the type of school and the level of study. Leitner extensively documented the subjects and texts taught in these schools. For example, the Arabic department covered grammar, literature, philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, law, logic, philosophy, arithmetic, and geometry (Leitner, 1882, p. 29). In addition to monetary payment, local landowners provided daily meals to teachers, primarily in the form of grain. Sialkot was noted for providing its students with a high-quality education, possibly due to the additional payment in grains received by teachers from local landowners. (Leitner, 1882, 31) Historically, educational institutions opened around 7:00 am and closed about 12:00 pm. Each class had a maximum of 50 pupils in accordance with contemporary pedagogical imperatives. A subedar from the region was sent to make sure this restriction was followed. To make sure that every student in the class received the correct attention, the offender was taken into custody and punished appropriately.

### **Prominent Muslim institutions in Lahore:**

In the city of Lahore, four main madrassa schools were in operation. The first was managed by Khalifa Ghulam Rasool at the mosque of Mooran (wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh), the second by

Molvi Jan Muhammad at Noor Iman Wali Masjid, the third also by Molvi Jan Muhammad at Mosque Khurasian, and the fourth by the Fakir brothers at their Faqir Khana. ( Kanhaiya Lal, 54) Mahmood, the Eunuch, a talented Persian and Arabic speaker, taught memorization of the Quran in the neighboring Faizullah mosque. Similar to this, Moulvi Nur Ahmed instructed students in mathematics, logic, Islamic law, and grammar in the Anarkali Mosque's advanced Arabic school. In the Sattar Mandi School, Pandit Gauri Shankar was well renowned for instructing students in mathematics, logic, medicine, and Purana literature. Larger than a college, Bara Mian's school in Lahore was renowned for providing top-notch higher education. This school received very considerable sponsorship from the Sikh government. In these institutes, students from Iran, Afghanistan, and Arabia also got education. Additionally, there were 18 official schools for girls in Lahore, which was also the center of specialized education, with schools for technical training, languages, arithmetic, and logic. There were also official religious institutions that provided Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus with sophisticated religious instruction. There were also specialized art and vocational schools that provided instruction in calligraphy, miniature painting, sketching, and drafting. In addition, there were over thirteen Quran, Arabic, and Persian schools in the Punjab that provided advanced instruction in math, logic, philosophy, and medicine. (Fauja Singh & A.C Arora, 1984, 306) In addition, the Qadri family, which was well-known for its scholarship, ran a sizable, well-known school in Batala that drew students from Iran and Afghanistan as well. For the upkeep of this school, the Maharaja had provided a sizable jagir (large land), which was eventually taken back under British authority. (Fauja Singh & A.C Arora, 1984, 311) In Sialkot, another location of Moulvi Sheikh Ahmed's renown for learning and knowledge, a comparable institution was started. The state was in charge of providing free food and books to the students who traveled from far-off places to attend these schools. Khawaja Suleiman operated a well-known school in Sangrosa, located in the Dera Ghazi Khan district, where students from Khorasan and various parts of Hindustan pursued higher education. (Leitner, 1882, 152)

Famous Muslim Scholars and Teachers: During Sikh rule in the Punjab, a long list of extremely knowledgeable and skilled teachers and educators existed who were given generous respect, endowments, and land for their own sustenance and the upkeep of their schools by the Sikh rulers.

(Leitner, 1882, 309) Hazim Shah, a writer, was awarded the jagir for his educational services despite regardless of the fact that he opposed the Sikhs in Shah Ahmad's jihad movement. (Leitner, 1882, 308) Ranjit Singh also invited Dubir-ud-din, whom money was sent from Delhi to fly to Lahore, (Lefont, 2002, 76) but because to his deteriorating health, he declined to attend the darbar. This demonstrates the Maharaja's interest in research and scholarly people, regardless of their religious beliefs or past deeds. Regardless of his ties to any particular group or religion, he valued them. Among them, Ahmad Yar, Qadir Yar, Fazal Shah, Ghulam Rasool, and the Imam Bakhsh were the most learned and well-respected. Imam Bakhsh, Ahmad Yar, Qadir Yar, Fazal Shah, Ghulam Rasool. The Fakir brothers' family is listed by Mufti Ghulam Sarwar among those from Lahore's ruling elite who were renowned for their literary standing and services. Several *maktabs* and schools were managed by the Fakir family. (Hali, 1986, 38) while Farid-ud-Din, Elahi Bakhsh, Mufti Imam Bakhsh, and Syed Israr Shah Gilani were well known for their poetry. (Ghulam Sarwar, 1859, 216) Ustad Pir Bakhsh and Mian Fazal-ud-Din were well known for their calligraphy, (H.R Mehta, 1996, 6) It is remarkable that despite Punjabi poets and other authors writing for him out of their own interest, neither Ranjit Singh nor the darbar ever commissioned any work honoring his military successes or his memoirs. Umdat-ut-*Tawarikh* and Moulvi Ahmed Yar's *Shahnama* were to be written in Persian, as requested by the Lahore Darbar, by Munshi Sohan Lal. Zafar Nama Ranjit Singh was written in Persian by the courtier of Ranjit Singh, Diwan Dina Nath's son, Diwan Amar Nath. During the reign of Ranjit Singh, Sikhs had a tradition of narrating their history via poetry. In 1841, Rattan Singh Bhangu penned his *Prachin Panth Parkas*. Another astounding fact was that the writers of those times' cleverness and originality, which grew out of their love for the common Punjabi and its responsibilities, (Ghulam Sarwar, 216) allowed Punjabi to become a literary language. Ranjit Singh allocated one tenth of his state revenue for charity, a striking illustration of his personality and government and highlighting its Sikh character. Schools and other such institutions were among the key recipients of his charity. The fifth Guru had advised Sikhs to devote *Daswandh*, or one tenth of their income, towards a religious cause for the general public. (The phenomenon of state-in-person carries the contradiction of the Sikh society and the Punjabi culture. Some aspects of Maharaja Ranjit Singh approach towards the languages or texts.)

According to Dr. Leitner, the Punjab, and particularly Lahore, fared better academically under Maharaja Ranjit Singh than under the British until 1882, the year his study was released. According to his research, Ranjit Singh earned a total of 1.85 million pounds in his final two years (1838–1839). In the end, the British were able to collect 1.45 million pounds. Leitner adds that "The Sikh monarch, as a fraction of the funds gathered, spent more on education than the Company.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh initiated a creative project called Quaida Noor to educate the people of Punjab. The primary source of this information is the Fakir Khana family, with mentions also found in Leitner's work. According to the Fakir Khana family's accounts, Maharaja Ranjit Singh wanted everyone in his kingdom to be literate. He thus proposed that Fakir Nuruddin develop a course to achieve this goal. Fakir Nuruddin created a booklet titled "Noor" (light) to teach the basics of key languages, including Gurmukhi, Shahmukhi, Urdu, and Persian, as well as elementary mathematics. Approximately 5,000 copies of the booklet were produced and distributed to village leaders (Numberdars) throughout Punjab. Each Numberdar was required to memorize Quaida Noor within three months and then produce five additional copies for distribution to five new villagers. Additionally, they had to handwrite a letter to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to inform him of their literacy and confirm that they had distributed the five copies of Quaida Noor. Each of the five individuals who received a copy from the Numberdar followed the same procedure: after memorizing the Quaida, they would prepare five more copies for further distribution. This process ensured the continuation of learning and the spread of education across Punjab.

Initially, Numberdars did not take this task seriously and avoided writing to the Maharaja. In response, Maharaja Ranjit Singh enforced the learning of Quaida Noor by removing any Numberdar who failed to comply from their position. Leitner noted that the war of 1857 destroyed this highly effective educational method, which was significantly superior to contemporary European systems

## Conclusion:

As a conclusion, we may state that the Sikh Period had an impressive educational system. For every person, there were several kinds of schools based on their languages and ethnicities. These schools each had predetermined curricula focusing on instructing pupils in knowledge, values, and morals. Ranjit Singh has a high regard for education and learning. Despite the fact that his administration was a military organization, he made substantial contributions to the native education and literary systems by giving grants of land and funding for their maintenance. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that he not only supported the already-existing institutions but also positively impacted the area of education by awarding grants to anyone, regardless of caste or religion. The royal family received instruction in English, Hindi, and Persian. This further demonstrates that both professors and students from Muslim and other communities have equal access to education and educational institutions. The entire Muslim community was granted freedom and the chance to learn new skills and information in order to raise their level of living by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

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15 G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab, Since Annexation and in 1882*, 53.

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28 W.G. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab, Since Annexation and in 1882*, 152.

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34 H.R. Mehta, *History of the Growth of the Western education in Punjab*, p. 211, n.p: Vintage Books, 1996.

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36 The phenomenon of state-in-person carries the contradiction of the Sikh society and the Punjabi culture. Some aspects of Maharaja Ranjit Singh approach towards the languages or texts.

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## Exploring the Link Between Citizenship Status and Voter Turnout: An Analysis of Voting Behaviour Patterns in Assam

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**Abstract:** *In the field of psephology, studying voting behaviour in terms of voter turnout is quite common. Several studies that have already taken place regarding the voter turnout in democratic countries including India showed multitude of reasons encompassing anti-incumbency, socio-economic factors, closeness of elections, increased party competition as reasons for higher voter turnout. However, one factor requires further exploration that is the need of the population to prove itself as citizens. In India, having enrolled in the electoral list is considered as a proof of an electorate's identity as a citizen and hence, there is a possibility of a correlation between the two variables that are the voter turnout and the proof of citizenship. In Assam, the issue of illegal immigration is prevalent giving impetus to the concern of a legal or illegal citizenship. National Register of Citizen (NRC), Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), all these are the results of the illegal immigration issue in the region. Therefore, this research aims to explore Assam's voting turnout after the election of 1985 in order to investigate the co-relation with the issue of citizenship and voter turnout. The primary objective is to analyse voter turnout to find a correlation with the factor of citizenship. To find the intended objective, dependent variable is the change in voter turnout and independent variable is the change in the demography of the districts in Assam. Due to illegal immigration, the border areas of Assam with Bangladesh have witnessed change in the demography (sudden increase in the population) and hence the need to prove themselves as citizens will be more in those border area districts which could lead to higher voter turnout in those districts. The result reveals that except Morigaon among all the bordering districts and except Darang among all the conflict-ridden districts show significant positive correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the two variables. For the said purpose, data has been accessed from the Election Commission of India website and the census reports showing the demographic change. The research includes the analysis of the voter turnout in the legislative assembly elections in the state from 1991 till 2016 to fulfil the objective.*

**Keywords:** Voting Behaviour, Voter Turnout, Citizenship, Assam, Election.

## Introduction:

Psephology, the study of voting behaviour, has long been a fascinating field, delving into various factors influencing voter turnout in democratic countries. In the diverse landscape of India, numerous studies have examined the reasons behind variations in voter participation, ranging from anti-incumbency to socio-economic factors, closeness of elections, and increased party competition<sup>1</sup> (Firoz Biswas et.al 2022, 4363-4389). However, one intriguing factor that demands further exploration is the relationship between voter turnout and the need of the population to prove itself as citizens. This dimension becomes particularly pertinent in the northeastern state of Assam, where issues of illegal immigration and concerns about legal and illegal citizenship have shaped the sociopolitical landscape<sup>2</sup> (Chandan Kumar Sharma 2012, 287-309). Lucy Dubochet (2023, 107-123), based on anthropological research, observes in one of the articles on issues of migrants in India's borderland areas that how being included on electoral registers is frequently the only means for deprived individuals, who frequently lack any other documentation except their voter identification cards, to maintain a flimsy sense of national identity. This study aims to analyse voter turnout in Assam, with a specific focus on the correlation with the proof of citizenship. Considering the context of the National Register of Citizens (NRC)<sup>3</sup> and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that have emerged in response to the complex issue of illegal immigration in the region (Ahmed et. al 2020, 3-25) it becomes imperative to undertake such a study to explore the connection between Citizenship and voter turnout. At its core, citizenship is a multifaceted concept that encapsulates both legal and sociopolitical dimensions. Legally, citizenship defines an individual's membership in a particular political community, endowing them with a set of rights and obligations. Sociopolitically, citizenship entails a commitment to the values and principles that underpin the democratic fabric of a society (Constantin Iordachi 2019, 562-581). In a democracy, the collective voice of citizens is instrumental in shaping policies, electing representatives, and ensuring the accountability of the government. The act of voting, a fundamental expression of citizenship, serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance, facilitating the participation of citizens in decision-making processes. Democracy thrives on the active engagement of its citizens, and the concept of citizenship provides the necessary framework for this engagement (Oluyemi O. Fayomi & Grace T. Adebayo 2018, 537-551). Citizens, by virtue of their legal status, are vested with the power to influence the direction of their nation through electoral

processes. Furthermore, citizenship entails a sense of belonging and shared identity, fostering a collective responsibility for the well-being of the democratic society. In this sense, citizenship acts as a bridge connecting individuals to the broader community, instilling a commitment to the common good and promoting the values that sustain democratic ideals. The concept of citizenship holds a paramount significance in the framework of a democracy, serving as the bedrock upon which the principles of civic engagement, rights, and responsibilities rest. In democratic societies, citizenship is not merely a legal status; rather, it is a dynamic relationship between individuals and the state, fostering a sense of belonging, shared values, and active participation in the political process. One crucial aspect of this relationship is the possession of proof of citizenship, which may play a pivotal role in influencing voter turnout (Jack Citrin et.al 2014, 228-242). Assam, located in the northeastern part of India, has been grappling with the issue of illegal immigration for decades, primarily along its border with Bangladesh. The influx of migrants has not only altered the demographic composition of certain districts but has also heightened concerns about the legitimacy of citizenship (K. R Dikshit et.al 2014, 457-502). The discourse of legal and illegal citizenship took a serious turn in 1979 following a by-election to the Mongoldoi Parliamentary Constituency which had a sizable East Bengali population. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) started the six-year Assam Movement in 1979 in an effort to bring attention to the issue of Assam's changing demographics as a result of immigration. A broad base of support was soon established for the movement to "save" the motherland from the immigrants, including support from literary organisations, cultural organisations, newspapers, journals, and associations of college and university instructors (Pranjit Saikia 2011, 80-81). The National Register of Citizens, introduced to identify and exclude illegal immigrants, and the Citizenship Amendment Act, which grants citizenship to specific religious groups, have been key developments in response to these challenges. In this intricate context, the relationship between voter turnout and the need to establish citizenship becomes a crucial area of investigation. Assam's proximity to Bangladesh has made it susceptible to large-scale illegal immigration, significantly impacting the demography of certain districts. The border areas have witnessed a sudden increase in population, leading to concerns about resource distribution, cultural assimilation, and, crucially, the verification of citizenship.

The state's population drastically changed following independence. The issue of illegal immigration in Assam has its origins in the redrawing of borders following independence, which resulted in changes in the local population. But the Assam Agitation, or Assam Movement, really began in 1979 when people saw that illegal immigrants were a threat to the state's political, social, and cultural fabric. The All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) spearheaded the movement, which called for the identification and deportation of undocumented immigrants (Sanjib Baruah 1986, 1184-1206). The leaders of the movement and the central government signed the Assam Accord in 1985 as a result of the protracted agitation. The agreement specified a number of steps to deal with the problem of illegal immigration, such as updating the NRC to track down and expel foreign nationals who arrived in Assam after March 24, 1971. Notwithstanding the agreement, accusations of political indifference and ineffective administration hampered the implementation of these policies over time. Assamese electoral dynamics have always been significantly shaped by the problem of illegal immigration. On this issue, political parties have frequently sided with or against the local populace's feelings (Jane S. Wilson 1992, 251-266).

The complex and sensitive nature of the issue has prompted governmental interventions, including the NRC and CAA, aimed at addressing the challenges posed by illegal immigration. Understanding the demographic changes is essential to contextualize the correlation between citizenship concerns and voter turnout. The National Register of Citizens, initiated in Assam in 1951, underwent a massive update process in recent years to identify and exclude illegal immigrants (Suraj Gogoi 2023, 85-103). The process required individuals to prove their citizenship through documentation, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety. The Citizenship Amendment Act, passed in 2019, further stirred controversy by offering citizenship to specific religious groups while excluding others (Asmita Jataria 2020, 1911). These developments have added layers to the ongoing citizenship discourse in Assam which has the potential to influence voter behaviour, particularly in areas directly affected by demographic changes. Building on the demographic changes resulting from illegal immigration, this study employs a conceptual framework to explore the multifaceted relationship between citizenship concerns and voter turnout. The framework incorporates elements of identity, legal recognition, and the psychological need to assert citizenship as key determinants influencing electoral participation. The districts experiencing significant demographic shifts are expected to show a

higher voter turnout due to the intensified need of the population to prove themselves as citizens. To test the hypothesis, a quantitative analysis is conducted using electoral data from various districts in Assam. The dependent variable in this study is the change in voter turnout, while the independent variable is the change in the demography of the districts. Demographic changes are assessed based on population growth and shifts in composition, with a specific focus on areas bordering Bangladesh where the impact of illegal immigration is most pronounced. Additionally, qualitative data from books, journal articles, and government reports are incorporated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between citizenship concerns and electoral participation.

#### Research Design of the Study:

The objective is to analyse voter turnout in the Assam assembly elections of 1991, 2001 and 2011 to find a correlation with the factor of proof of citizenship. This research employs a methodology grounded in the analysis of secondary data to fulfil its designated objective. To ascertain a statistically significant comprehension of the acquired data, correlation analysis is implemented. The independent variable under scrutiny is the demographic shift in the border districts along the Bangladesh frontier, while the dependent variable is the corresponding shift in voter turnout within those districts. The temporal focus of this study centres on the period subsequent to the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, with a specific examination of the Assembly elections held in 1991, 2001, and 2011. The chosen timeframe allows for an exploration of the correlation between voter turnout and the demographic alterations in the border districts over these electoral cycles. To gauge the demographic changes, census data from 1991, 2001, and 2011 are utilized to delineate district-wise population shifts. These raw population shift figures are then transformed into percentages, reflecting the proportional change from one census to another. Simultaneously, the voter turnout data for the selected Assembly elections is also converted into percentage values. Leveraging Ms Excel, the transformed datasets are subjected to correlation analysis, probing for any statistically significant relationships between the two variables. The ensuing results of this analytical process are expounded upon in the subsequent section of this research work.

### **Exploring the Link Between Citizenship Status and Voter Turnout**

Until the year 2011, Assam was comprised of 27 districts according to the Census data. However, a notable demographic shift has been observed in certain districts, marked by a discrepancy between birth rates and overall population growth. Specifically, the districts of Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Cachar, Dhubri, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Morigaon and Nagaon have experienced substantial changes in their demography since 1971 (M. Borah and Sangeeta Borah 2016, 2278-5728). It is noteworthy that Dhubri, Hailakandi, and Karimganj share borders with Bangladesh, and districts such as Nagaon, Barpeta, and Cachar have a historical backdrop of migration dating back to the colonial era, which persisted post-independence (Madhumita Sarma 2015, 22). The selection of these districts for analysis is informed by the significant impact of demographic shifts on their socio-political landscape. Additionally, two more districts, namely Kokrajhar and Udalguri, have been included in the study due to their history of major conflicts between the Muslim population and the local indigenous communities<sup>4</sup>. These conflicts often revolve around accusations of immigration from Bangladesh, prompting a need for individuals to assert their citizenship status (Surashree Pathak 2017, 138-147). Being listed on the electoral lists has been a significant symbol of citizenship in Assam since the late 1970s, both at the state and local levels. It has also been used as a tool to control the narrative of Indian citizenship in Northeast India (Shabnam Surita 2020, 85). Hence, the hypothesis of the study is that the bordering districts and the conflict-ridden districts will show a positive correlation between the increase in the population and increase in the voter turnout since going out to vote is a way to keep oneself enrolled in the voter list. The study aims to explore the correlation between voter turnout and the demographic changes in these selected districts because of the complex interplay of historical, social, and political factors shaping the region.

#### ***Demographic Shifts in the Bordering and Conflict-Ridden Districts:***

The data collected from the Census report outlines the population changes in the selected districts for study across three census periods: 1991, 2001, and 2011. Each district's population is provided for each census year along with the percentage change compared to the previous census. Over the two-decade span, all districts experienced population growth. Barpeta saw an increase from 1,163,166 in 1991 to 1,693,622 in 2011, with growth rates of 140 per cent and 121 per cent in the respective periods. Similarly, Bongaigaon's population rose from 497,962

to 738,804, showing consistent growth rates of 158 per cent, 123 per cent, and 120 per cent across the three census periods. Cachar, Dhubri, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Nagaon, and Udalguri also exhibited significant population increases, albeit with some fluctuations in growth rates over time. For example, Dhubri's population surged from 1,265,706 to 1,949,258, experiencing growth rates of 154 per cent, 123 per cent, and 124 per cent across the three census periods. Interestingly, Kokrajhar witnessed a substantial growth rate of 178 per cent in 1991, but this growth slowed down significantly in subsequent years, with growth rates of 113 per cent and 105 per cent in 2001 and 2011, respectively.

#### ***District Wise Voter Turnout from 1991 to 2011:***

The district-wise voter turnout percentages for the Assembly Elections in Assam across three different years: 1991, 2001, and 2011 reveal fluctuating trends in voter participation over the three decades. Notably, districts like Barpeta, Bongaigaon, and Dhubri generally maintained moderate to high turnout rates, with minimal fluctuations observed over the years. Conversely, districts such as Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi exhibited comparatively lower turnout percentages across all three years, with slight variations. Kokrajhar showed a notable decline in turnout from 1991 to 2011 despite starting with a high initial percentage. Udalguri also demonstrated a significant decrease in turnout over the years. Overall, while some districts consistently displayed robust political engagement, others experienced fluctuating levels of voter participation.

#### ***Correlation Coefficient Analysis***

The correlation coefficients quantify the strength and direction of the relationship between population shift and voter turnout in the bordering and conflict-ridden districts of Assam across three time periods: 1991, 2001, and 2011. A correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to 1, where 1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, and 0 indicates no correlation. Looking at the coefficients, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Cachar, Dhubri, Hailakandi, and Karimganj all exhibit strong positive correlations ranging from 0.73 to 0.99. This suggests that as the population shifted over the years, there was a corresponding increase in voter turnout. Particularly, districts like Karimganj show a near-perfect correlation between population shift and voter turnout across all three periods. Kokrajhar, on the other hand, shows a moderate positive correlation ranging from 0.66. While there is still a positive relationship

between population shift and voter turnout, it's not as strong as in other districts. Nagaon stands out with a very weak positive correlation of 0.16. This indicates that there's almost no discernible relationship between population shift and voter turnout in this district over the observed time periods. Overall, these correlation coefficients indicate that there is generally a positive relationship between population shift and voter turnout in the bordering and conflict-ridden districts of Assam. Voter turnout and population change in border area districts, as well as districts where there are confrontations between the indigenous population and accused illegal immigrants, are positively correlated. The intriguing finding is that the association values are negative in the districts that do not border Bangladesh and where there has a history of lesser number of hostilities between the native population and alleged illegal immigrants. Several districts exhibit strong negative correlations, ranging from -0.84 to -1, indicating an inverse relationship between population shift and voter turnout. This suggests that as population shift increases, voter turnout tends to decrease. Notable districts in this category include Karbi Anglong, Kamrup, Kamrup (M), Nalbari, Goalpara, Morigaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dhemaji, and Sonitpur. Particularly striking is the perfect negative correlation (-1) observed in Darrang, indicating a complete inverse relationship between population shift and voter turnout across all three time periods despite having a history of turmoil between the suspected illegal immigrants and the indigenous population in 1978. Some districts display moderate negative correlations, ranging from -0.50 to -0.73, implying a somewhat weaker but still discernible inverse relationship between population shift and voter turnout. These districts include Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh. Dima Hasao and Tinsukia exhibiting weaker negative correlations of -0.90 and -0.38 respectively. While still negative, these correlations suggest a less pronounced inverse relationship between population shift and voter turnout compared to other districts.

There is a significant link ( $p$  value  $0.01 < 0.05$ ) between the independent and dependent variables, as indicated by a regression analysis done on the variables. The population shift in the conflict-ridden districts and districts bordering Bangladesh in Assam during the years 1991, 2001, and 2011 as a result of an increase in the number of suspected illegal immigrants is the independent variable, and the change in voter turnout in these same districts during the assembly elections in 1991, 2001, and 2011 is the dependent variable. All of the selected districts have demonstrated a substantial positive connection between the independent and



dependent variables, with the exception of Morigaon, which has experienced a significant population increase similar to the other bordering districts and also with the exception of Darang which experienced social turmoil like other conflict-ridden districts. Depending on the result, we can significantly assert that the secondary data is supporting the hypothesis that proof of citizenship through enrolling oneself into voter list is one of the factors of higher voter turnout in the bordering and conflict-ridden districts of Assam.

### **Conclusion:**

In light of the observed demographic shifts in certain districts of Assam, the analysis of secondary data has yielded intriguing insights, suggesting a potential correlation between proof of citizenship, as demonstrated through enrolment in the voter list, and higher voter turnout in the bordering and conflict-ridden regions. The selection of districts such as Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Nagaon, Kokrajhar, and Udalguri for the study was deliberate, as these areas have witnessed significant changes in their population dynamics since 1971. The historical context of migration, both during the colonial era and post-independence, coupled with the proximity to the Bangladesh border, underscores the complexity of the demographic challenges faced by these districts. The nexus between citizenship and voter participation becomes particularly pronounced in the context of Assam's intricate socio-political landscape. Notably, Dhubri, Hailakandi, and Karimganj, with their shared borders with Bangladesh, have experienced heightened concerns regarding citizenship status, thereby making proof of citizenship a salient aspect of individual identity. Furthermore, districts like Nagaon, Barpeta, and Cachar, marked by a historical legacy of migration, continue to grapple with demographic changes, and the voter list emerges as a tangible expression of one's legal standing within the nation. The inclusion of Kokrajhar and Udalguri in the study adds another layer of complexity, as these districts have been marred by conflicts between the Muslim population and indigenous communities. In conclusion, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between proof of citizenship, as reflected in the voter behaviour in terms of voter turnout in specific districts of Assam. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of citizenship challenges in these regions and emphasize the role of electoral participation as a mechanism for individuals to assert and validate their citizenship status amidst evolving socio-political landscapes.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Firoz Biswas et. al. (2023) Offers a qualitative understanding of the voting behaviour in Uttar Pradesh highlighting factors like communal violence sidelining developmental factors (1317-1340). Firoz Biswas (2023) observes that in the geo-cultural setting of Bihar, caste based politics is prevalent in influencing voting behaviour (655-689).

<sup>2</sup> Biren Saikia (2015) examines how illegal immigration from the neighbouring state of Bangladesh has social and economic impact on the indigenous population of Assam (58).

<sup>3</sup> Deepankar Basu (2020) highlighted several key issues with the fundamental flaws in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) updating process in Assam and stressed the importance of creating an alternative narrative (55).

<sup>4</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray (2008) discusses the ethnic violence primarily between the Bodo tribals and Muslim settlers in two northern districts of Assam, Darang and Udalguri, which resulted in at least 55 deaths and over 100 injuries (1-4).

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## Recentring the 'Periphery': A Socio-Historical Perspective of Poonch Borderland in Jammu and Kashmir

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### Abstract

*This paper seeks to understand the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir as a social space inhabited by people who negotiate the existence of LoC as a social reality on an everyday basis. In doing so, this paper offers a critique of the popular ascription of terms like border, borderland, and periphery on Poonch district in mainstream scholarship specifically because, as this paper shows, Poonch district has existed as a singular socio-political entity since historical times, right until the partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947. Drawing from historical sources, this paper foregrounds the connectedness that these borderlanders shared, and continue to share with each other through different means of communication.*

### Introduction

The making of borders after the British subcontinent meant that India shares territorial congruity with six countries namely China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Nepal, in addition to a water frontier with Sri Lanka. Out of the total border area that India shares with Pakistan, almost one-third of it is found in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K, hereafter) (Sangra 2010). One such marker of territorial division is the Line of Control — a temporary arrangement between India and Pakistan drawn in 1949 following the UN-mediated ceasefire (Robinson 2013, 31). Hundreds of thousands of people were divided and displaced as a result of this territorial arrangement. One of the regions that were worst affected by this arrangement is the present-day Poonch district of J&K. Presently, there is a 103 km long LoC on the northern, western, and southern side of Poonch district and a major chunk of population of the district still lives along it (Husain and Manchanda 2013).

This paper, through a critical engagement with the existing literature, aims to bring forth the historical trajectories of Poonch to demonstrate the integral nature of borders in

rendering marginality to land, its people, and their everyday lives. It uses social constructionism as a theoretical lens to understand how borders become an everyday reality for the borderlanders. Using Newman's (2006) analysis, the LoC is conceptualised as a superimposed border that was imposed in utter disregard of the prevalent ethnic and tribal ties. The term 'borderland' throughout the paper is meant as a region that is significantly affected by the presence of an international boundary line (Baud and Schendel 1997).

### **Present Scholarship and its Critique**

The political and other regional issues of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh have found a substantial place in the literature (Puri 1966, Chowdhary 2012, Choudhary 2015). However, Poonch finds a reference only when it is about borders (primarily the ceasefire violations in media reportage), thus, reducing its other issues to the periphery and taking away the centrality it has held since antiquity. Even the reference in terms of borders is marginal and inadequate. It has borders on its three sides (North, South, and West) but is yet to register the presence and impact of LoC on the life of the people.

Husain & Manchanda (2013) have focused more on militarisation than any other aspect of the border life, Cabeiri Robinson (2013) has addressed border crossings in the 1990s, and Sharma (2021) has mapped the several trajectories of identity within a multi-religious ethnic group called *Paharis* in the Poonch borderland. Of late, there has also been an increased broadcast of the cross-border shelling in the televised media and there have also been some studies on cross-LoC bus service and cross-LoC trade such as Bouzas (2019) and Kira (2011). Elsewhere, Poonch finds a mention largely in terms of the Poonch revolt of 1947 against the Maharaja Hari Singh's oppressive administrative measures (Lamb 1994; Snedden 2015) and to some extent in reference to the insurgency that this region grappled with in the late 1990s to early 2000s (Puri 1993; Bloeria 1999).

In the works mentioned above, one does not come across in detail the impact LoC effectuated for the region and the people of Poonch. An account of people facing the border as an everyday social reality corresponding to their own perceptions, has largely remained peripheral. It might have to do with what Anderson, O'Dowd and Wilson (2002, 3) remark as the paradoxical neglect of the borders in disputed areas where state exists as an everyday reality

and pushes the issue of borders to periphery in geographical, political, historical, and social terms. Historically J&K, Poonch district in particular, has been the centre of various empires, cross-cultural interactions, and economic exchange. Such a history contradicts the modern conceptualisations of J&K as a border state and Poonch as a border district (Zutshi 2010). Thus, a critique that foregrounds the historical connectedness of people and sustained cross-border interactions challenges the very legitimacy of borders as barriers.

One of the corollaries of the existing literature on borders — centre-periphery binary — is that the ‘periphery’ view has always been overshadowed by the ‘centre’ view. All the works mentioned above tackle the issues pertaining to J&K from the ‘mainland’ vantage point i.e., from Kashmir valley, Jammu or Ladakh. The next section proceeds to problematise this peripherality that has been imposed on Poonch by engaging with the historical trajectories of the region. A rich history that shows engagement with neighbouring as well as far-off cultures counters this peripherality.

### **Peripheralising the Centre**

Chitralkha Zutshi (2010) argues that Kashmir has historically been a meeting point for distinct cultures, various empires and Central Asian economies. In a similar vein, Poonch, since antiquity, has been at the centre stage because of its strategic location, climatic conditions, and warrior tribes. It always acted as a natural geographical defender of Kashmir Valley and its warrior tribes formed the core of Kashmiri ruler’s cavalry. It is, thus, popularly known as the battlefield of Kashmir (Maini 2012, 3). Some historical accounts suggest that Hiuen Tsang visited Poonch around 633 A.D. (Bamzai 1994; Hutchison and Vogel 1994). Poonch was then known by the name of *Parontsa*. As per Hiuen Tsang’s account, *Parontsa* was then inhabited by the great Khasha tribes as well as the Buddhists. Maini (2012) attests to this fact by pointing out how several historians contend that the popular conversation of Malinda Panho between King Manendra and the monk Naga Sinha took place in the present day Mendhar, an administrative unit of Poonch District. The evidence of the same is claimed to have been found in Mendhar in the form of an Indo-Greek style monastery.

The foundations of the Lohara dynasty of Kashmir were laid in present day Loran area of Poonch district (Hutchison and Vogel 1994, 700). The Loran fort figures in both Kalhan’s

(Dutt 1879) and Al Beruni's (Hutchison and Vogel 1994) accounts as it twice successfully withstood the siege of Mahmud Ghazni. Poonch remained an autonomous state and a feudatory till the death of Utkarsha in 1089 A.D. (Bamzai 1994; Hutchison and Vogel 1994). From this time onwards, it was a part of the Kashmir province and the fort was used as a state prison, treasure house, and a place of refuge in times of need. Nonetheless, it always played an important role in Kashmir politics (Hutchison and Vogel 1994, 714).

Kalhana in *Raj Tarangini* also writes that King Abhimanyu retired to Dhruva Abhisara in winters (Dutt 1879; Maini 2012). The Raja along with the whole Darbar and public moved to Poonch and this practice remained in vogue for quite a long time (Maini 2012, 50). This exercise, until recently did take place but the shift was between Srinagar and Jammu, with Srinagar being the summer capital and Jammu the winter capital. The famous defeat of Porus at the hands of Alexander could take place only after the Abhisaries (Poonchies) followed a policy of non-interference after negotiations with the General of Alexander (Bamzai 1994; Maini 2012). Even during the Muslim rule, the rulers took due help from Poonchies. A Poonchi named Behram Naik played a key role in leading Mughals to Kashmir (Maini 2012, 92). Poonch also remained significant strategically because of its location. The only strategic entry points to Kashmir valley until it was finally opened to the world were Tosa Maidan route and the Nimak route, the starting point of both being Poonch (Dutt 1879; Bamzai 1994; Maini 2012).

Circa 1820s and the Sikh empire, Poonch was captured by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Lamb 1994). In 1822, Gulab Singh was nominated as the Raja of Jammu by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. At the same time, Poonch, along with Chibbal and Bhimber was granted as a *Jagir* to Dhian Singh (one of the younger brothers of Maharaja Gulab Singh). Back then, Poonch comprised of Poonch as well as Mirpur (in Pakistan-administered Kashmir today). Soon after the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, and the subsequent murder of Dhian Singh in 1843, the Sikh empire fell into anarchy. Gulab Singh started treating Poonch as his own *Jagir*, whereas in reality it was left to the rule of Moti Singh; one of the sons of Dhian Singh. After the Treaties of Lahore and Amritsar, the British sold the newly created Jammu & Kashmir state to Gulab Singh who was recognised as an independent ruler there on. Poonch was still an independent *Jagir*. However, the Maharaja handed it over to Dhian Singh's heirs—Jawahir Singh and Moti Singh—who were required to pay an annual highly-symbolic tribute while maintaining their



own autonomy over their *Jagirs*. The brothers tried to assert their independent rule over Poonch but the intervention of British Resident forced them to acknowledge the suzerainty of Gulab Singh over their territory. This suzerainty continued right until 1947 when a new ruling dispensation took over the erstwhile princely states of J&K.

Till 1920s, Poonch was just like another princely state, a member of Punjab Hill States as they were named by the British Government of India. However, with the enthronement of Hari Singh as the Maharaja of J&K, and Jagat Dev Singh as the Raja of Poonch, the animosity between the two grew with former beginning the formal annexation of the *Jagir* of Poonch on various pretexts and through a military attack in 1936. The successor of Raja Jagat Dev Singh in 1940, being a minor, made things further easy for the Maharaja and even the government of British India did not interfere owing to the large number of soldiers recruited from Kashmir who fought the World War II on their behalf. The Poonch Rajas, despite ruling a *Jagir* with Muslim majority population, had always maintained peaceful relations with the subjects and no rebellion except for a small one in 1830s took place.

The men of Poonch were traditional soldiers. Over twenty thousand of them fought from the British side in the First World War and the number of those joining the British side in the Second World War soared up to sixty thousand (Lamb 1994; Bose 2021). All the ex-servicemen returning to their homeland made things difficult for the Maharaja for they did not acknowledge the Maharaja's despotic rule. This was essentially the beginning of what runs down the history as the 'Poonch revolt.' They had long expressed their resentment against the Dogra rule as an illegitimate regime and after returning from the war, they saw their lands taxed and even confiscated by the Maharaja. Both Joseph Korbel (1954) as well as Victoria Schofield (1996) have described in detail the origins of this revolt. Whatever was left of their land and property was taxed arbitrarily. Their cattle, sheep, even wives and widows were taxed by the Maharaja (Snedden 2013). A natural riposte was an armed revolt which the Maharaja began crushing with force.

Poonch, therefore, became the epicentre of the 1947 anti-tax revolt against the Maharaja's authority as well as his excesses. What began as a protest against the excessive taxes, gradually turned into a full-fledged revolt against the oppressiveness of Dogra regime. The Dogra army in June 1947 started disarming the Muslim peasants and redistributed the arms

to the Hindu and Sikh landlords (Robinson 2013). These Muslim peasants brought their families to the safe territory of Murree and Abbotabad and returned back along with smuggled weaponry across the river Jhelum (41). It was by late August 1947, that an armed battle raged on between the Maharaja's army and the peasants who now demanded liberation for Kashmir and accession to Pakistan. Their political leaders had declared their own provisional government in Poonch and deposed the authority of the King as on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1947 (Robinson 2013).

With the partition violence in Punjab spilling over to Jammu province, the Maharaja's forces were successful in pushing the armed rebels further towards Pakistan unless a point arrived beyond which they could not proceed. Following the outbreak of the first Indo-Pak War of 1949, a ceasefire line was drawn and accepted which subsequently became the LoC (not an international border). While both India and Pakistan, to this day, blame each other for the political events that occurred in the erstwhile state of J&K in 1947, the fact remains that the people whose land, life, and identity was compromised were its worst victims. Poonch, thus, went from being a single geopolitical entity to a border region divided on either side of LoC. The LoC, thus, can be understood as a superimposed border, which was clearly drawn without taking into consideration the existing socio-cultural ties of the people who had been living as one since ages and their fate entrusted to those representatives whom they did not identify with up till then.

The term superimposed border here is borrowed from Newman's (2006) analysis of the process of border formation. Superimposed borders are the ones which, much like their name are imposed by a power on a region under the politico-administrative control without any recognition of the already prevailing ethnic and tribal ties. The result of such superimposition is naturally the division of such settlements between two states or more or at times a territory with several ethnic groups. These are often the source of conflict or ethnic friction which is quite a case with the LoC too.

### **The LoC as a Social Reality**

Border formation and state formation in general, is contextual and distinct. The impact that a particular border has is hence context-specific too. The political and territorial arrangement by

virtue of LoC was supposed to be temporary but it has gained a permanent character over the years corresponding to the intractability of the conflict in Kashmir and has led to the displacement of a quarter of the population of the princely state of J&K (Robinson 2013, 31). It victimised the people who had been living unitedly, by turning them into borderlanders overnight and tossing them into two different nationalities by redrawing the lines on the map. Baud and Schendel (1997) argue that the makers of regional maps slice the peripheries into pieces and it is a treatment that can never be meted out to the heartland. The people, thus, became the victims of the cartographic designs carried out by the two states.

The fact remains that, as Charles Tilly (1975) points out, state formation is always a violent process. Poonch faced the tragedy of being the field where state and border formation occurred. People have been killed to begin with, displaced from their homelands and the resultant border has divided them permanently, and scattered their families and communities. This is the social reality that people in the area are living in — a fragmented social life that has been the tragic outcome of the logic of political power. The LoC in this case, divided erstwhile Poonch; the town remained on the Indian side and the rest of the area on the Pakistani side. A 103 km long LoC was carved in the heart of Poonch and around two-third area i.e., 1000 square miles area came under the administrative control of Pakistan and the remaining area of around 627 square miles, became part of the territories administratively controlled by India. In 1952, the area under Indian administration was attached with Rajouri and the Poonch-Rajouri district emerged. It was later bifurcated on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1967 (Maini 2012, Husain and Manchanda 2013). The LoC also impacted the traditional trade and travel routes that the princely state of J&K shared with Central Asia, Tibet as well as cities of Punjab like Lahore and Amritsar (Robinson, 2013).

About 60 per cent of Poonch *Jagir* went to Pakistan-administered Kashmir after the establishment of LoC in 1949 as the UN Ceasefire Line (Husain and Manchanda 2013). Also, around 60 per cent of the families of Poonch *Jagir* got divided in the three successive Indo-Pak wars of 1947, 1965 and 1971 (Husain and Manchanda 2013). Those displaced in 1949 is numbered at 750000 which is exactly 20 per cent of the four-crore population enumerated in the 1941 census (Robinson 2013, 47). Till 1965, it was a porous arrangement and people could traverse across rather freely, in contravention to the divisive concept of borders (Bhatia 2011). In the 1965 war, the Poonch-Rajouri belt was infiltrated with thousands of armed insurgents

from across the LoC. However, Indian Army's Operation Clearance drove them back and simultaneously paved way for permanent military encampments in the area shrinking all kinds of spaces and movement of local people. This war saw the second migration of Muslims from Poonch-Rajouri to Pakistan-administered Kashmir and also led to the complete closure of LoC. Zafar Choudhary (2015) calculates the loss in population in Poonch-Rajouri from 1971 to 1981 at 397,003.

The creation of LoC resulted in some people waking up to being refugees in their own land with their property and land being on the other side. They became not only displaced but refugees in their own land (Robinson 2013). People residing close to the LoC live in highly militarised zones, their social lives are pervaded by the military gaze. The density of militarisation around the LoC is ever increasing (Jamwal and Suchismita 2011). More militarisation on either side has meant more conflagrations between armies of the two states (Jamwal and Suchismita 2011, 75). Militarisation also led to the displacement of people within Poonch district of Indian-administered Kashmir. There have been casualties on both sides of LoC because of the border skirmishes and also when the borders were mined, fenced, and sealed (Jamwal and Suchismita 2011, 90). In the villages along the LoC in Mendhar *Tehsil* of Poonch district alone, around 10 per cent people have been amputated because of landmines and the compensation that the Indian government provides is minimal and rare as well (Jamwal and Suchismita 2011, 77).

Interestingly, on the one hand, the LoC does represent the agonies, conflict, violence, and everyday suffering but on the other, it has not been able to regulate the interconnectedness between people on both sides of the LoC. That is, in words of Robinson (2013), it was never a social boundary. People did maintain their kinship alliances across the border. In the early decades, people would even cross over for the same and to attend important rituals like funerals (Robinson, 2013, p. 54). But such crossings became dangerous after the 1971 war when LoC shifted from being a mere political front to a full-fledged military front. However, ever since the LoC became rigid, the cross-border alliances, even though interrupted intermittently, resume as soon as the political relations between the two countries become stable in the form of cross-LoC bus service and cross-LoC trade. In fact, it was the interconnectedness between the people in the first place that forced the initiation of such measures as the bus service and trade exchange. And despite the restrictions, there are also instances of people marrying across the

LoC (Robinson 2013; Bouzas 2019). One can then safely point out that the social relatedness does not always succumb to the pressures of political power.

Such interconnectedness between the people living on borderlands also reaffirms the nature of political belongingness and questions the compartmentalising tendencies of the nation-states. In other words, it indicates as Robinson (2013, 33) calls it, ‘a struggle of the ruled to establish limits on the sovereign power of their rulers’. The LoC showcases cycles of shift from being a border to a pervious barrier and becoming closed again. It also represents how the LoC has become a social fact over time; it is coercive, it sets limits and applies to those who inhabit it. That is; no matter the regime of power, LoC constantly remains a symbol of violence it inflicts on the lives of people who have a direct contact with it, a fact which Baud and Schendel (1997) highlight while referring to the South Asian borders.

## **Conclusion**

The peripheralization of Poonch district in Jammu and Kashmir contextualises the debates and processes of border-making to study the social realities that LoC effectuates for the people of Poonch. The LoC is a reminder of the divisive nature of borders which segregate cultures and communities, ignoring their centrality and reducing them to the periphery. The impact of superimposition of LoC as a border in Poonch brought to fore new social realities for the people. This paper highlights how borders are not necessarily as clear and fixed as their cartographic representation indicates. They are rather the fuzzy categories which can be seen as everyday social spaces inhabited by the people whose daily life is in turn regulated by this very social reality.

However, borders will certainly exist as long as the nation-states do. The enormity of resources that states possess, and people do not, and the sustenance of interstate conflict ensures the perpetuation of map-making, territory-drawing, and hence, border-making. It is but difficult to think of a borderless world also because of the mental maps and borders that these physical borders stimulate.

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## Paradox of Regional Cooperation in Changing Geo-Political Context: Assessing India's Approach to Regional Integration in South Asia

Raja Lohar

### Abstract

*Geo-political strategic calculations and economic requirements have crucially impacted the regional vision and approach of the South Asian countries. The disparity in size, resources, development and power between India and its immediate neighbours has generated a perception of India as a dominant actor in the South Asia. Due to bilateral blunders such as the longstanding issue of India-Pakistan and other factors, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation's progress has been hindered. In this scenario, to meet changing geo-political and geo-economics, Indian regionalism has evolved. Resetting its regional perspectives through reshaping its bilateral and subregional cooperations in security and development areas has become the impetus to foster relations with neighbouring countries. This paper first re-envision the regional integration paradox in South Asia through critical analysis of different factors and perceptions of the countries and tries to find out the missing links and convergence areas for cooperation. This paper then explores how India is approaching for regional integration in South Asia in a changing geo-political context.*

**Keywords:** strategic calculations, paradox, bilateral blunders, re-envision,

### Introduction

'The logic of geography is compelling. For India, the neighbourhood radiates in concentric circles, buttressed by history, cultural affinities and economic necessities' (Ansari, 2009, 03). However, these series of Concentric also overlap circles. The security and economic dynamics of the region are impacted by each other's behavioural approaches and actions in South Asia. Regional cooperation has remained a catalyst for maintaining strategic security dynamics and economic growth. Regional cooperation has been influenced by a number of factors, especially the convergence of political interests, cultural compatibility, and economic growth. The failure of South Asia to emerge as a coherent regional integration has resulted in several issues for all regional countries in the region: fragmented infrastructure connectivity, economic growth blockade, security paradox or zone of India-China power rivalry and so on.

India occupied 72 per cent of the total land surface and more than 70 per cent of the economic output of South Asia. The disparity in geographical size, defence power, economic power, and long-standing



historical confrontations have generated India as a hegemon or big brother country in the region. Although historically, South Asia has been reluctant to accept India as the natural leader of the region, there are several crucial areas where regional perceptions for cooperation merge, such as non-traditional security challenges, economic opportunities, connectivity and maritime security cooperations.

India's Approach to regionalism has evolved since the formation of the South Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. India was apprehensive about the possible future pressure from smaller countries in the form of majority tyranny if the organisations came to form. However, India has joined with the perception of economic growth in the region and is maintaining its status quo. India's regional approach since the frozen situation of SAARC has changed through multiple mechanisms to achieve its national interests. Preference for bilateralism, sub-regionalism and new regionalism or the wider meaning of regionalism, has been witnessed in India's foreign policy.

'Regions are constructed ideas and entities and reflect a variety of ontological dimensions' and also have epistemological issues that need to be addressed (Vinod, 2021). Regional dynamics deals with different geo-economic, geopolitical, and geo-strategic attributes. The real nuance behind forming the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was to deter India's influence (Tripathi, 2016). Geopolitical narratives have crucially impacted bilateral and regional cooperations in South Asia. However, Despite the failure of SAARC in recent years, the changing geopolitical scenario in world affairs has regenerated the need for regional cooperation.

Bhumitra Chakma argued that the regional institutions of South Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) were formulated in terms of regional cooperation and economic growth but actually operated, keeping the politico-strategic calculations of the member states (Bhumitra Chakma, 2020, 03). In this context, this paper first re-envision the regional integration paradox in South Asia through a critical analysis of different factors and perceptions of the countries and tries to find out the missing links and convergence areas. This paper then explores how India is approaching for regional integration in South Asia in a changing geo-political context.

### **Re-envisioning the Paradox of Regional Integration and cooperations in South Asia**

Regional cooperation in South Asia in a geo-political context has been hindered by several dynamics that need to be explored to make space for new regional construction for the development of the region. Regional perception regarding Security narratives in South Asia remains limited to bilateral or inter-state

and specific conflicts. For example, India-Pakistan rivalry, Bangladesh-Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and India-Nepal border issues. India-Pakistan long-standing conflict and confrontation have hindered the regional integration of South Asia. There are several unexplored aspects that acted as hindrances to cooperation that need to be analysed.

*India as a Perceived Hegemon and Domestic Compulsion:*

India has failed to manage the threat perception inherited in the smaller countries of South Asia; this continuous trajectory has led to unfinished distrust among them. Rather than structural attributes, hegemony is more of a behavioural trait. This behavioural trait has generated perceptions towards each other, which is also influenced by the projection and reaction dynamics in South Asia. However, India as a hegemon state has also been influenced by its structure and attributes, which have historical and geographical linkages. Bhasin argued that small states with weak resources generally have aggressive policies, while states with impressive resources have adopted consensual elements (Bhasin, 2008). However, It depends upon the projection and reception of those policies by the states.

India's intervention in smaller South Asian states and reactive role has generated antagonism in the perception of these smaller countries. At the same time, India's reactive policies against China's initiatives have also generated contrasting perceptions. As India is not able to generate consensus with countries regarding its security concerns, and second, China's investments attracted economic growth opportunities to South Asian countries. Iqbal Cheema argued that collective efforts in South Asia have not been successful not because of India's status but because of how smaller states see India's actions (Cheema, 1999).

The state in this region is also a "site of contestations" among several contending social and political communities (Behera, 2019 & Barthwal-Datta & Basu, 2017, 395). Political elites in South Asian countries tend to see National and regional security only through the survival of the state and its institutions and the preservation of territorial integrity (Barthwal-Datta & Basu, 2017, 395). Newly elected Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu won the election with a pledge to end the 'India First Policy' and called for withdrawing Indian troops from Maldives by citing sovereignty concerns. whereas Muizzu also agreed to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China. Making regional integration more unstable (Junayd, 2024).

*Disagreement due to Vision Variance: Security and Economic Dynamics*

For more than three decades, South Asian regionalism has been missing convergences in their regional policies and perceptions. The academia and countries have different narratives about South Asia as a security region. India's intervention in domestic matters of South Countries has generated contrasting perceptions among the other small countries. In terms of regional security, South Asian countries saw SAARC to consolidate their sovereignty concerns by forming a cooperative security architecture. India wanted to maintain its status quo and influence. India's evolving perception in recent years sees South Asia as a strategic arc and a gateway to outreach in Southeast Countries through the Act East policy. Chinese presence through infrastructure and connectivity in the neighbourhood has generated contradictory predicaments against Indian cooperation. Indian Prime Minister Modi stressed at the 18th summit of SAARC in 2014 that organisations failed to move speedily because 'we are struck behind the walls of our differences and hesitant to move out of the shadows of the past' (MEA, 2014).

Contrasting economic outlooks of South Asian countries have failed to generalise a common narrative among countries. India adopted an import substitution policy for economic growth with self-sufficiency, showing protectionism and de-regionalism until 1990. At the same time, before SAARC formation, Pakistan also had an import substitution policy but was outward-looking. Other countries, too, had different visions, from socialist-oriented economic autarky to a mixed economy (Chakma, 2021, 05). After 1991, India changed its economic policy and focused on export-led growth, but the same cannot be seen in other countries. Pakistan remained reluctant to integrate into the regional economy, and its economic strategy remained unchanged.

Countries like Nepal still favour the revival of SAARC, but countries like Bangladesh and India are not very keen on this. India focuses on other regional groups for regional cooperation, like the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) and BIMSTEC. Indian political elites believe that SAARC is not fulfilling the economic opportunities that India is looking for

*China:*

India and China's competition and rivalry reshaping the South Asian region (Muni & Jetly, 2010, 25).

*Indo-Pak Conflict and Unfinished Quest for Status Quo between India and* nal dynamics. China's presence has brought instability and geo-political security complexities as a central factor in Indian and South Asian relations. This unfinished quest for the status quo has generated a bargaining space and play card for South Asian countries against India and China for dealing with competitive strategies, which ultimately limits

space for regional collaborative strategies. Bangladesh is strategically hedging both countries. Chinese presence has jeopardised India's relations with other countries. For example, despite historical relations, India and Nepal are going down. China has emerged as an alternative for Nepal in terms of development aspirations. The same also applies to India-Maldives decreasing cooperation. Newly elected Pro-China president Mohamed Muizzu has started seeing India as challenging Maldives' sovereignty.

India and Pakistan's confrontations due to the Kashmir issue and terrorism concerns have played the most damaging role in the way of regional cooperation in South Asia. Due to China's friendly relations, animosity and bitterness between India and Pakistan have also widened. Containing China and Pakistan have taken place in India's South Asian policy (Pant & Shah, 2022, p.105).

### **Exploring the Missing Links and convergence areas for regional integration**

Despite the oscillations and bilateral hurdles, regional cooperations have occupied not only geo-political but also geoeconomics and strategic importance. Regional cooperation depends upon how political actors perceive and interpret the notion of cooperation and regions. Exploring the missing links in a paradox situation may help for future prospects of regional or subregional integration. Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha said that Both SAARC and BIMSTEC have their own importance, and revival of the regional organisation is needed for the development of the region and need to learn from past and other countries' progress (Kathmandu post, 2024).

In order to revive regional integration and continuous growth of regional grouping, we need to explore the missing links. One of the main problems with SAARC has been that it has given each country a veto over decisions by needing majority consent. While such a strategy safeguards each state's sovereignty, it may impede attempts towards regional integration. There is a need to form or reform an existing institution that must follow democratic principles but, at the same time, prevent any kind of Majority tyranny and subordination to any, which will prevent any kind of country's reluctant attitude toward any kind of initiative. The base goal for any regional cooperation and integration should be to act regionally and equitably in the decision-making process (Thangasamy, 2019, 03).

Bilateral blunder: Another concern is that regional organisations should not allow bilateral issues and contentious issues to be brought into the organisation for deliberations. Which can be a hurdle to the effective functioning of the organisation. Bilateral issues need a neutral stand for resolution. South Asian

historical, cultural and security interlinked do not provide a neutral stand for resolution for the issues. For example, India and Pakistan brought the issue of Kashmir and cross-border terrorism related to Pakistan in 2016 into the SAARC and ultimately scheduled a summit in 2016 called off. However, a terrorist attack on an Indian Military base in 2016 became the main reason behind the conflict relations between India and Pakistan's stance in SAARC. Since then, it has been in a frozen situation.

Essentially, SAARC serves as a platform for national governments in South Asia to advocate for their concerns; it is neither a regional administration nor a political organisation with policy-making authority (Obino, 2009 & Thangasamy, 2019). Policy initiatives and implementation where SAARC is unable to perform effectively. There is still no transit agreement for road and rail traffic across the SAARC countries. There is a need for clearer and better bureaucratic procedures and tariffs; for example, cross-border or cross-national trade via road, rail, or sea needs to wait for long times due to a lack of proper infrastructure and bureaucratic hassles. This resulted in high trade costs and led to a reluctant attitude by countries toward intra-regional trade. Disaster management and response are areas where South Asia is still unable to form an institutionalised sub-organization for better coordination and actions.

South Asia consists of both island and landlocked countries and has different structural compositions and stages of development. So, exploiting the diversity and opportunities through complementarities in trading will provide space for intra-regional trade (Agarwal, 2020). Intra-regional trade and connectivity initiatives need to be explored. There is a need for a specialised connectivity programme, as landlocked and island countries of South Asia have an issue with additional transportation costs (De & Kumarasamy, 2024). The emergence of dynamic and different markets at the regional and global levels has attracted countries to regional integration to meet the infrastructure and connectivity issues and unlock balanced and equitable development objectives.

There is a need for a greater focus on economic and non-security challenges. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar recently stated that economic diplomacy is important to India's neighbourhood First Policy, which will 'create a large sense of regionalism that is key to rise. And connectivity is central to this endeavour' (Yhome, 2020 & Ministry of External Affairs, 2020). The Porous land and maritime border between South Asian states have not been able to deal with terrorism, climatic change, etc. There is a need to focus on non-traditional security challenges in land and sea as well. With growing sea-borne trade and

the importance of sea lines of communication, cooperation for the maritime domain, capacity building will be a significant and attractive aspect of regional cooperation in South Asia. India, with its naval power, has a greater role to play in this direction.

India should let smaller powers lead regional cooperation in South Asia in certain areas to mitigate the mistrust and threat perception and keep China out of the backyard. India should back respective countries, which will help build confidence. Regional integration is necessitated as global cooperation for critical challenges cannot be solved by any single power but rather by cooperation among like-minded countries.

### **Assessing India's Approach For Regional Integration and Cooperation**

Indian leading power aspirations are very much influenced by the trajectories that shape relations between India and South Asian Countries. In recent years, the Indian regional approach has been a combination of wider meaning regional cooperation, preference for bilateral relations and subregional platforms to build trust, increase economic growth and security and check China's growing influence. Indian vision for the South Asia region's cooperation is based on five pillars of Trade, investments, assistance, and cooperation through seamless connectivity (Ministry of External Affairs, 2014). In this direction, resetting regional foreign policy is very crucial to keep up with changing geopolitical affairs. India's regionalism approach in recent years is more inclusive, where security and development are being considered. Instead of a zero-sum game, India favours win-win opportunities by prioritising its own and partner countries equally.

#### *Resetting the regionalism of South Asia*

If we look at the 'regional security complex theory' propounded by Buzan and Wever, South Asian security and cooperation are likely to impact not only its development dynamics but also interest beyond the region (Buzan & Waever, 2003). India following new dynamics of regionalism. 'India Should break out of the claustrophobic confines of South Asia' (Gupta, 1997 & Scott, 2011). Former Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh, under Bjp government, in Singapore in 2000, said that 'South Asia was always a dubious framework for situating the Indian security paradigm' for this 'India's parameter of security concerns clearly extend beyond confines of the convenient albeit questionable geographical definition of South Asia'(Singh, 2000 & Scott, 2011). India's regional approach recently focused on a wider definition of regionalism.

The Cold War world order witnessed a 'new regionalism', and its process began at interregional, inter-state, and subregional levels. It was 'extroverted and open regionalism'. (Yhome & Maini, 2017:150, Hetme & Soderbaum, 1998). The shadow of new regionalism can be traced back to India's 'Gujrat Doctrine' and later to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government. They emphasise building good faith and trust without reciprocity and sharing prosperity with the neighbourhood. India, under the Narendra Modi government, is resetting the regional integration. India has restructured its foreign policy to be more cooperative and accommodating towards South Asian countries in order to foster relationships through political and economic relations and cultural engagements through bilateral and multilateral engagements in emerging organisations. India's acceptance of the solution of land boundary in 2015 and maritime boundary disputes in 2014 with Bangladesh without objection has shown the attributes in this direction. India favours bilateralism and sub-regionalism as stepping stones for regional integration. Indian policy think tankers in recent years urged to redefine the concept of South Asia regionalism to Include Myanmar and exclude trouble some neighbours like Pakistan (Karim,2013). India is also actively approaching sub-regional cooperation through BIMSTEC, Colombo Security Conclave organisations, etc., which can provide a base for regional integration. However, how India's constructive engagements have been perceived and receptive by neighbours is necessary to understand the regional integration process.

India has favoured subregional cooperation in recent years. As a result of the continuous failure of SAARC, India has approached with BIMSTEC, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal(BBIN), Colombo Security Conclave. India's growing interest in regional and subregional integration is not solely for the Pakistan Factor but rather for Indian opportunities and challenges associated with the organisations (Yhome, 2020).

#### *South Asia to Southern Asia integrations:*

Indian changing contours of foreign policy for regionalism can be evident in several instances. Indian Prime Minister at the 2014 Kathmandu SAARC summit stated that regional integration of South Asia will remain our focus 'through SAARC or outside it, among all of or some us'(Ministry of External Affairs, 2014 & Marjani, 2022). BIMSTEC reconciles India's three sub-regions and strategic peripheries: the Himalayan region and South and Southeast Asia. This subregion fulfils India's geo-economic goal of economic trade growth and the geo-political interest of Checking China. S Jaishankar said that SAARC is in trouble or crisis and stated in favour of BIMSTEC, 'It is not like there are no problems. The situation in Myanmar is very challenging. But I would say we do not have the same issues in BIMSTEC as we do in Saarc. There is a will to cooperate, there is a desire to take it forward' (Business Standard, 2024). BIMSTEC provides

the impetus for cooperation in economic and connectivity areas, which are now crucial factors behind economic development and strategic calculations.

India is setting a base for regional cooperation through a bilateral cooperative approach. India's proactive and cooperative approach is shaping neighbouring countries' perceptions. India started solving its bilateral issues, such as land boundary in 2015 and maritime boundary disputes in 2014 with Bangladesh. infrastructure and economic investments, grants and aids are crucial aspects in this direction. In this, Culture and civilisation ethos has become base for fostering regional cooperation, which was not present earlier in Indian foreign policy (Xavier, 2020).

*Connectivity and maritime cooperations:*

Dis-connectivity in land and sea remains a long-standing concern in South Asian affairs, reflecting divergences in the region's geostrategic and economic protectionism thinking. S Jaishankar recently stressed that economic diplomacy, especially connectivity, is central to creating a sense of regionalism, and India is 'today rapidly bringing the connectivity deficit that has constrained our prospects till now', and South Asia remains central to it (Ministry of External Affairs, 2020). India's bilateral and subregional cooperations under the Act East Policy, The Neighbourhood First Policy, and SAGAR are steps in this direction. Connectivity projects such as the Maitru Setu bridge with Bangladesh, the Kaladan multimodal project in Myanmar, etc, are some strategically relevant initiatives. Economic openness and reducing trade barriers are things India is working on to utilise the ongoing connectivity initiatives.

Maritime cooperation with the neighbouring countries is emerging as a crucial aspect of the Indian regional approach. Besides providing infrastructure help, people-to-people connections, tourism, security cooperations for Maritime domain awareness, and capacity-building partnerships are cooperative spaces. Indian Net's security provider vision, which resembles India's dominant role, has been replaced by a preferred security partner vision for neighbouring countries, resetting India as a partner in need. Bilateral and multilateral naval exercises such as Milan are shaping the maritime perspective in the Indian Ocean region. India has also set up a coastal radar network and Information Fusion Centre to disseminate maritime information with littoral countries of the Indian Ocean. Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) consists of four members: India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius and two observer members, Seychelles and Bangladesh. emerging as a new sub-regionalism group concentrating on maritime domain affairs. CSC



mostly focuses on cooperation to deal with non-traditional maritime challenges, and regular NSA-level meetings have been going on in recent years.

## Conclusion

India's cooperative engagements with its neighbours are also a prerequisite for its own security and legitimate influence in the region. Other than the Pakistan factor, instability and competing strategies of India and China have fragile the regional integration narratives.

India needs to consider the sensitivities of countries, which became a hurdle in the BBIN motor vehicle agreement, due to which Bhutan delayed the initiative. Civilisational connection and past recreation strategies need to be used very carefully; otherwise, they can generate misperceptions or cause difficulty in engaging in such projects. Political leaders in respective countries need to move away from the politics of blaming neighbouring countries for any kind of instability, governance and insurgency issues in their own countries. They try to use blaming politics to gain power in their countries. Recently, the 'India out' campaign in the Maldives and growing antagonism against India among Bangladeshi People is an example of how a ruling government (now in Maldives), as well as the opposition government (currently Bangladesh), are also responsible for regional cooperation instability in the region. Despite these, Indian foreign policy has been able to foster close ties with neighbouring countries in several areas of trade, connectivity in land and sea, and defence cooperation.

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## **Maslow Revisited: Anupama's Quest for Self-actualisation in Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta***

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### **Abstract**

*The novel Mahashweta by Padma Bhushan awardee Sudha Murty is a multifaceted narrative that delves into the life of Anupama and her journey amidst the social stigma associated with her skin disorder, leukoderma. It unfolds the struggles and challenges Anupama faces to fulfil her basic needs. This research article analyses the character Anupama and the events in her life through the theoretical lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's psychological framework is categorised into five levels, from fundamental needs to self-actualisation. Anupama's quest to fulfil her physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs and reach self-actualisation is presented in this paper. This paper further explores the endeavours contributing to character development amidst societal pressure. It is examined from the backdrop of family relationships, social prejudices, economic status, superstitious beliefs associated with skin disorder and psychological dilemmas.*

**Keywords: Psychology, basic needs, leukoderma, society, relationship**

Indian writing in English has paved the way for the women writers to speak for themselves and other Indian women. Women writers use their literary creations as a tool to empower women. One such empowering writer is Sudha Murty. Being a philanthropist, she comes across various individuals, which helps her create realistic stories. Her novels are filled with several ways to emerge from the cultural stigma. The protagonists often find themselves entangled in the web of desires driven by personal aspirations and societal pressure. "The postcolonial Indian English writers focus on major issues relating to women such as her awakening to the realisation of her individuality, her breaking away with a traditional image, her relation with man and her aims and objectives" (Suganthi 2022, 947).

Sudha Murty, in her novel *Mahashweta*, breaks societal prejudice through the character Anupama. The manipulative nature of man has been discussed, and how a woman's strong will can change her life is portrayed in the novel. Navgire expounds this ideology in the research article "Breaking the Stereotypes of Female Psyche: A Study of Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta*" about "The thinking of the society is that men can manipulate the woman, but that is very well broken in the novel *Mahashweta*. The protagonist breaks society's psyche and creates her place and identity in the world" (136). The narrative unfolds the societal norms where beauty standards and economic status are highly important.

Sudha Murty places a premium on the narrow focus on the physical and emotional needs of the protagonist. Her narratives stand as a mirror to society in portraying human emotions and feelings. She delves into the emotional and psychological aspects of deprivation. Her stories illustrate values, simple life in villages, materialistic desires and their negative impacts, Indian culture, tradition, and family relationships. Sudha Murty's works differentiate between the needs and wants of the protagonists, which can be better understood by the hierarchy of basic needs proposed by Abraham Maslow.

Maslow's Ideology successfully provides hope and solutions for human issues in a civilisation. As a humanist psychologist, he gives an optimistic approach towards the psychological perspective of life. He presents a human-centred hierarchy of necessities in his proposed theory, *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Maslow has given a pyramidal representation of human needs: physiological needs at their base, self-actualisation at their top, safety needs, love and belonging needs, and esteem needs in between. These basic needs shape a person's behaviour. For instance, in terms of physiological needs, a homeless man's need is fulfilled with a home.

The desires of humans are categorised into a hierarchy based on how satisfied or unsatisfied they are. This theory is proposed from the clinical experience of psychologist Maslow and two other psychologists' theories, Freud's and Adler's. The motivation theory, developed by Sigmund Freud, describes how a person's unconscious impulses and psychological factors influence and inspire their action. Maslow claims this notion of motivation as an individual's primary need. Every human has basic needs, which are emphasised in Maslow's theory of motivation. His hypothesis states that the satisfaction of one need is pleased upon satisfying another need:

At once other (and “higher”) needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still “higher”) needs emerge and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organised into a hierarchy of relative prepotency.

(Maslow 2020, 14)

Needs can either be subjective and psychological or objective and physical. Needs such as self-respect and self-realisation are all personal and related to our minds. On the other hand, needs such as food, air, and sunlight are physical and objective. Maslow states that to satisfy our psychological needs, one must fulfil his physical need, which is the basic need for any human. As explained by Maslow, physiological or biological needs form the basis of the pyramidal structure. Humans cannot sustain themselves without food, air, water, and shelter, which are physical needs. Man can efficiently work if he/she is satisfied at this stage. These needs cannot be prolonged or skipped as they contribute to a person’s health. At one stage, these needs become hindrances to growth if they are not fulfilled.

Literature frequently captures the cultural and historical milieu in which it is set. Physiological needs can be understood differently depending on historical developments, technological improvements, and the organisation of society. It can also be viewed through the prism of social commentary, in which the protagonists’ struggles serve to draw attention to environmental issues and socioeconomic inequality. The quest for essentials might be a life-changing event that fortifies a character’s resilience. Maslow’s literature representations of biological needs go beyond a person’s basic survival needs. It may be viewed as a narrative device highlighting the human condition’s intricacies. When a character’s basic survival is in trouble, physiological demands combine with higher-level needs in Maslow’s hierarchy, making it difficult for them to focus on personal objectives or meaningful connections. This deepens the characters’ motivations and behaviours.

Anupama, the protagonist of the novel *Mahashweta* (2000), comes from a lower-middle-class household and seeks education through scholarships. She moves into her husband’s enormous bungalow after being married, which appears like a dream come true for her. Anupama’s reputation deteriorates at home when vitiligo, a skin disorder, is diagnosed. Her in-laws discriminate against her and reject her. “Sabakka was an uneducated and old-fashioned woman who believed that white patches brought bad luck and were contagious.” (Murty

2007, 73). The housemaid tells her not to enter the pooja room and pollute it. "The trauma of her life makes her understand that no other human being is coming to help her, so she decides to make her fortune." (Navgire 2021, 137). Despite facing enough disrespect from her in-laws, she tries to save her father's respect by moving out of the house. "I embrace life's circumstances without any remorse" (Murty 2007, 127).

Anupama's problems started when she started questioning her own identity and values. The apparent white areas on her body begin to cause an internal conflict, which undermines her self-assurance. She decides to relocate to Bombay for a better place, where she dwells in a little flat with her friend Sumithra and her husband, Hari. Anupama regrets not owning a place of her own. "Sumithra was her friend, but how would Hari feel if she continued to stay there for some length of time?. Anupama was always conscious that she was a guest in their house and felt it would be best to move out as soon as possible" (Murty 2007, 93).

This kind of portrayal can often be seen in Indian writing in English, where female authors try to depict the societal pressure and treatment of women in their in-laws' place. For example, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in her novel *Sister of My Hearts*, places her premium on narrating the life of a married woman at her in-law's place. Sudha is being treated differently for late pregnancy, and she was forced to abort the child after knowing the gender of the baby. "Though women work for a happy married life, sometimes it is shattered by others around her. In Sudha's case, it is her mother-in-law who does not accept Sudha to carry a girl child, forcing her to abort the child. This kind of injustice, gender bias and discrimination even when the foetus is in the womb is seen in more traditional and conservative societies like India" (Praba 2021, 567).

The character Sudha, from *Sister of My Heart*, can be brought parallel to Anupama. The life after their failed marriage is the most relatable one. The differences between these characters are that Anupama is an educated woman and struggles less than Sudha. The lack of education in Sudha made her jump from one job to another, which took time to satisfy her basic needs. Anupama could stand independent and satisfy her basic needs with the help of education. Sudha Murty and Chitra Banerjee, both authors, are trying to imbibe one notion in the modern reader's mind, which is education. Women's education is a must, as it gives them the courage to face the world. "Anu, isn't it Anand's duty to send you some money to support you? Can't Dr Desai tell him this at least?" 'Sumi, I do not want money from someone who does not love me. God will provide for me. I have my education, and it will serve to feed me.'" (Murty 2007, 92) Education gave courage to face the world. Anupama is a metaphor who shows the world that education can make a woman independent and survive.

Manju Kapur, another Indian author, delves into the themes focusing on the importance of women's education in her novels. "Manju Kapur advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. It is important to note that education plays a dominant role in the lives of women. If in certain cases it fails to free them from the shackles of male dominance, social tradition and popular prejudices. It also gives them the authority to doubt and question to assert and reshape their lives" (Guru 2017,543).

Women need a place of their own to establish their potential. As Virginia Woolf states in *A Room of One's Own*, Anupama starts the quest for a better place. She works extremely hard and persistently to secure a job as a Sanskrit lecturer and begins to make money. She can meet some of her fundamental physiological demands. This was possible because of the education. This description might result from the knowledge that people without fundamental physiological demands cannot focus and are constantly distracted from their objectives. Life gets more complex, and people must catch up on their enthusiasm while prioritising finding food and a house. The character Anupama was successful because she could satisfy her physiological needs, irrespective of her skin problem.

Divakaruni also explores the dilemma of middle-class, educated female characters. In *Sister of My Heart*, through the character Anju, "Divakaruni explores the psyche of the middle-class, educated Indian woman, focusing primarily on her dilemma at being caught between modernity, which implies freedom, individuality and self-expression and the patriarchal and traditional values that continue to permeate contemporary Indian society." (Rakwal 2022, 39).

An individual must feel secure enough to think efficiently. Feeling safe is one of the most essential needs in a person's life. In Maslow's hierarchy, safety is a second need in the pyramidal structure. Family and society can fulfil safety needs. Safety demands include access to money, personal safety, social welfare, health care, and other control over their lives. A person's childhood experience dramatically impacts a person's life. A trauma-free life keeps an individual safe and comfortable. All other demands, including physiological needs, are subordinated when an individual's safety is compromised. Maslow goes on to clarify the need for safety,

The healthy, normal and fortunate adult in our culture is largely satisfied in his safety needs. The peaceful, smoothly running, 'good' society ordinarily makes its members feel safe enough from wild animals, extremes of temperature, criminal assault and murder, chaos, tyranny, etc. Therefore, in a genuine sense, he no longer has any safety needs as active



motivators. Just as a sated man no longer feels hungry, a safe man no longer feels endangered.  
(Maslow 2020, 20)

Anupama's leukoderma is diagnosed after getting married. Her in-laws drive her away because of numerous superstitions connected to the illness. Lack of support from her family makes her feel insecure. She feels unsafe because of the constant pressure from society. She is not financially stable enough to be independent, so she finally decides to travel to Bombay. In Bombay, her friend Sumitra assists her. Sudha Murty writes, "Anupama stepped onto the platform at Dadar railway station, feeling anxious and tense. She had never been to Bombay before and was flabbergasted by the huge crowds" (Murty 2017, 80).

For a short while, she felt secure staying with Sumitra. However, Sumitra's husband tries to misbehave and take advantage of her. Men like Hari Prasad put women's safety and security at risk. He threatens to let her be with him. "Let me go!" Anupama shouted. 'Anu, you are as hungry for the pleasures of marital life as I am. If you don't agree to do as I say, I will turn Sumi against you. I'll convince her that you were chasing me. She will believe her husband over her friend, any day'" (Murty 2007, 99).

Divakaruni also brings up a similar incident in her sequel novel *Vine of Desires*, where Sudha's safety is at risk during her stay in Anju's house. Anju's husband, Sunil, gets physically attracted to Sudha, knowing that she is moving out of the house. The significance of bringing this repeated incident in Indian novels is to emphasise the fact that women's security is at risk. It is the most essential need for every woman.

Anupama leaves the place and relocates to her friend Dolly's home, where she finds more freedom. "Vasant had begun to attend Anupama's plays regularly, at different locations in Bombay, and he also visited her library quite often. Their casual acquaintance had now turned into a deep friendship." (Murty 2007, 124) Dr Satya and Vasant become Anupama's friends. "Male are considered biologically stronger than females." (Rajeswari 2022, 1248) The arrival of Dr. Satya and Vasant has brought back the lost confidence in the mind of Anupama. She shares about her failed marriage and the agony she underwent with Vasant and Satya. Their respect for Anupama increases after they learn about her past life and the misfortunes she faced. She states that she feels secure staying with her friends:

I have been fortunate enough to live in a place like Bombay where even this mad rush has a humane side to it. I have excellent friends who trust me and will not hesitate to help me if I am

in trouble. All my students are as dear to me as my children would have been. Their unconditional love has never made me think of myself as blemished. (Murty, 2017, 148)

She starts growing by satisfying her safety needs through her friends and becomes financially independent. Her safety needs are gratified, which keeps her moving upward in life. Suganthi, in her research article, makes a remark on Sudha Murty's style, "Her women strive to overcome their perplexities, sense of isolation, fear and emotional vulnerability and find new horizons of self-esteem and liberation." (2022, 954).

According to the hierarchy, wants for safety, love, and physiology come first, followed by a new set of demands, including esteem and self-respect. Internal and external variables can impact an individual's need for self-esteem, and the methods in which they are satisfied might vary depending on the socio-cultural and personal context. Creating a positive self-concept and a better degree of self-confidence is achieved by accomplishing the demands related to esteem. There are two subtypes of esteems. The first type demonstrates the desire for strength, sufficiency, and a sense of self-confidence, as well as the willpower to face the outside world and pursue freedom and independence, which are perceived as personal qualities. On the other hand, the second kind, which is exclusive to society, is concerned with status, dignity, admiration, attention, fame, and glory.

Lack of permanent dwelling creates a psychological problem. Maslow places the need for love and belongingness below the demands of physiology and safety in the hierarchy. This includes the ties they have formed with their loved ones, friends, and life partners. It all comes down to loving and being loved. Love needs are regarded as an essential aspect of a person's psychological well-being since they prevent alienation, anxiety, and sadness. Developing relationships, friendships, and group connections are all part of meeting demands for love and belonging. The fundamental need for a sense of belonging is meaningful relationships and connections with other people.

In the case of Anupama, her internal growth is visible after finding good people around her and a permanent place to dwell in. "Her eyes sparkled with confidence; there was not a trace of self-pity in her demeanour. Anupama seemed to have grown in stature." (Murty 2007, 159) All living things, including humans and animals, have essential love needs since they have constantly evolved in social groups. Nowadays, people strive to fit into a group that can provide their social demands, such as a family, marriage, team, social club, or nation. On the other hand, when someone's demands for social interaction and a sense of belonging are

not met, it can have a detrimental effect on their psycho-social well-being. Depending on the situation and surroundings, a person's behaviour may change due to denying their love demands.

Towards the end of the story, it is noted that Anupama's husband is willing to embrace her, but she disputes this as being the new woman. 'It would be better for us to part now and never communicate with each other again. We met accidentally, but we were not made for each other. Let us part with a good grace.'" (Murty 2007, 162) The author depicts a new woman in a society who rejects male dominance and forges her own identity instead of bending over herself and pleading for her life. "The novels show how women always gain self-esteem in facing the adversities of their lives, assert their individuality and aspire to self-reliance through education. They are capable of being independent and leading lives on their own" (Parvathi 2016, 882).

As Maslow rightly states, once basic needs are satisfied, all other needs fall into place automatically. This hierarchy can be observed through the character Anupama from the novel *Mahaswetha*. Once Anupama satisfied her physiological, safety, love and belongingness, she started feeling high and respected for her deeds. Financial stability makes a person grow higher in life without any obstacles. The first three needs are essential, and one needs to concentrate on them to reach the pinnacle of Self-actualisation. "Self-actualization implies self-fulfilment, self-expression, self-development, personal achievement and full realisation of potentialities." (Rani 2017, 244)

The last stage in the hierarchy of needs is self-actualisation. "Self-actualization is the desire to become what one is capable of becoming. It is a 'growth' need." (Trivedi 2019, 40). The character Anupama reaches this stage. This need is hardly satisfied by any person in their lifetime, but this character depicts fulfilling all the needs one desires. She attains the pinnacle by helping others and doing what makes her soul happy. "A person desires to have challenges and achieve something special in his life or the area of his specialisation. Though everyone is capable of self-actualisation, many do not reach this stage. This need is fully satisfied rarely" (Trivedi 2019, 4).

Sudha Murty has depicted female characters as strong human beings. By neglecting society and realising their potential, her character grew as an independent woman. "Self-actualization is a moment when an individual finds the truth of life and understands its purpose." (Kalsoom 2021, 409), which is true in the case of Anupama. She finds that teaching Sanskrit, enacting Sanskrit plays, and helping the poor are her life's purposes. Their protagonists are strong enough to face the world despite physical and emotional challenges.

Sudha Murty starts her novel with a dedication, “To all those women in our country who suppress their emotions and suffer silently because they have leukoderma. May they be imbued with hope and courage.” (Murty 2017, i). She also succeeds in rooting hope and courage through the character Anupama.

Anupama realises her true potential after going to Bombay and enjoys complete freedom. After settling her basic needs, she feels self-respected and grows higher. She is portrayed as confident by rejecting Vasant’s proposal and Anand’s plea. That is when she ultimately realises herself and believes she can survive without a companion. Sanil, in the article “Exploring Sudha Murthy’s Narrative *Mahasweta*: A Journey From Rejection to Embracing to Embracing Female Identity”, makes an observation that “Anupama endures the societal oppression, bravely continues with her uphill task of fighting against skin ailment, and, through her compassion, wins everyone’s heart, including Dr. Vasant. This way, once rejected, Anupama enters a new phase of self-realisation and comes out of all odds as a winner. Her sufferings led her to self-discover her innate potential and lead a peaceful and content life.” (2024, c579)

Sudha Murty has depicted Anupama as a brave woman who defies Indian patriarchal ideologies and comes out of the strings. “I am not dependent on anyone for emotional or financial support, and that has given me enormous strength. I thank God for having been so fortunate.” (Murty 2007, 162). This marks the personal growth of a person. This attitude influences the modern reader and instils hope in their mind. Life does not end with a marriage; at the same time, the disease can never hinder achieving great things. Health should never become an obstacle; the character Anupama proved to the younger generation. She stands as an inspiration for all the women.

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**At the Gendered Crossroads of Nationalism and Empire: Deconstructing the Effects of Religion and Colonialism in Feminist European Discourses on Indian Women**

**Sakshi**

**Abstract**

*The Hindu religious sentiment in India peaked during the nineteenth century as it coincided with a pronounced imperial setting. This was accompanied by the Victorian feminist response brought in by European women who had strived for women emancipation back home. These white women of the West swarmed the land of the 'other' as missionaries, maids and memsahibs. Their newfound access to the notion of equality and other liberal perceptions lay at crossroads with the subaltern status of women in colonial India. The white women, therefore, shared the "white man's burden" to further the imperial enterprise by taking upon themselves to rescue and reform the lives of Indian women. She was worse positioned in the gendered discourse offered by Europeans about the Orient since, she was doubly marginalized at the hands of both, colonial and communal patriarchy. Adopting varied subject positions, the white women of the nineteenth century proposed diverse assessments of their 'heathen sisters' and made ethnographic observations on the 'lived realities' of Indian women. Arriving at a time when religious differences intensified, owing to the novel wave of Hindu nationalism, their observations were driven as much by Eurocentrism as by the heightened disparities amongst various local communities. This paper aims to assess the perceptions and prejudices offered by European women while negotiating the position of native women in Indian society driven by religious dictates.*

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Eurocentrism, Nationalism, Patriarchy, Religion, Subaltern

**Introduction**

Historically, the world witnessed the origins of organised feminist movement against the backdrop of Victorian imperialism. Nineteenth century Europe, especially Britain, became privy to the arguments led by the liberal feminists who advocated for the emancipation of women. As a parallel development to the women's question, was the hyper-masculine image of Britain as a geopolitical super power. This shifted the burden to maintain its supremacy upon

its newly liberated Victorian women. Thereby, resulting in a symbiotic relationship between the Empire and its women. The European feminists thus, took to themselves, the responsibility of carrying forward and maintaining colonial hegemony<sup>i</sup>. As a corollary, there was a massive influx of white women travellers to India, especially post the rebellion of 1857.

Following the sepoy mutiny, the Hindu woman emerged as a semiotic focal point around which the discourses of nationalism, colonialism and feminism intersected in a rather nuanced way. The crisis that unleashed after the rebellion altered the approach of imperial governance in India from that of a supposedly benevolent ruler to that of a hegemonic one. The English consciousness shivered at the sight of inhuman brutalities inflicted by Indian men upon British women and children. The image of the superior 'self' was thus endangered by the barbaric and untamed 'other'<sup>ii</sup>. To safeguard and sustain a rather hefty portrayal of dominance in terms of an imagined English nation, its boundaries needed to be broadened to encompass the oppressed Indian woman as a subject of inquiry and upliftment. Consequently, the rhetoric of being the benign saviour extended itself to the subjugated "other", who in this case was the native woman (Said, 1978, p.1).

The social history of nineteenth century India is often depicted as a tussle between the women reformers who advocated for the modernization of women; and the traditionalists, who subsumed the role of preservers of conventional systems and opposed novelty. The canon of women's writing and the expanse of feminist criticism highlighted many critical inquiries that shaped the literary contributions made by both the coloniser and colonised women. Their intriguing narratives were laden with questions concerning the socio-political contexts within which women wrote. Their writings were structured and reshaped by the evolving ideologies of class, gender and Empire while intersecting with the perceptions with which their works were read. Therefore, the political dynamics of the colonised/coloniser relationship determined the reception and influence of their work by delving into the sexual as well as essential categories. Furthermore, these discourses explored the resistance, subversion and strategic appropriation that defined the radical approach towards expressing their experiences (Tharu, 1991, p.11).

Hence, the women's question aligned itself with the debates around progress and modernity offered in the process of discovering elements that would entail the portrayal of the 'new woman' in Bengal and as an extension, in India. The relevance of this paper lies in its



meticulous examination of how the concept of this 'new woman' emerged within the 'ambivalent space'<sup>iii</sup>, to quote Homi Bhabha, that perspired at the collision of colonial subjugation and a burgeoning Hindu nationalism. The dialectics of feminism and patriarchy rested on the edifice of the colonial state and the dynamics of anti-colonial movements. Moreover, a negation of the presence of other prominent communities like the Muslims and Parsees renders any standardised study exceedingly fragile and runs the risk of committing 'epistemic violence' across the paradigm of history, since communalism served a crucial role in the shaping of any such dialectic (Spivak, 1988, p.53).

### **The Empowered Parsee**

The induction of feminism within oriental consciousness has been a significant and enduring theme in the academic study of colonialism. The imperial masters portrayed the native subjects as ignorant, passive, submissive and sexually unrestrained who had to be controlled by a powerful patriarchal presence. Such a binary dialectic put the Westerners in a rather volatile position and served as a troop to further establish Eurocentric supremacy. Ashis Nandy labels such a dynamic of colonial interaction as a 'language of homology between the sexual and the political' that resulted in a cultural collusion of the nineteenth century Indian elite and the ethos of superior masculinity presented by the English which seemed worthy of being emulated (Nandy, 2009, p.6). One such community that thoroughly embraced and adopted the glorified British ideals was that of the Parsees. They strived for a similar reconfiguration as far as the image of their entire community, including that of their women, was concerned.

Therefore, most European interactions and narratives that surrounded the status or lives of the Parsee women seemed to sing of admiration about the community and treated them as not typically native to the subcontinent. Historically, the religious identity and ancestral roots of the Parsee community in India can be traced back to pre-Islamic Iran that followed Zoroastrianism before 651 C.E. and migrated to establish settlements in India and other places throughout the world with the primary objective of preserving their original faith. The Parsee community believed that their assimilation into the Indian milieu, with the exception of their religion, was conditional to their acceptance, conciliation and therefore, security in the land. They followed suit within the colonial setup as well. Thus, colonialism played a crucial role in

shaping their identity and re-presenting their evolved perceptions of self and community to the world by acknowledging coherence with their historical background and development.

The Parsees lineage was thus re-defined and accorded with central prominence during the colonial period where they achieved great heights. As a result, the Parsee community witnessed tremendous social and economic transformation that was re-imagined to become a stable one. Their mannerisms and style of dressing also shared close similitude with that of the English. Mary Carpenter, the English educator and reformer during nineteenth century held for the Parsee women that, 'they almost uniformly wore an English looking jacket and skirt, and come often very highly ornamented with shoes and stockings. . . . this dress had a remarkably neat and pleasing appearance' (Sen, 2008, p.13).

The status of relevance bestowed on the Parsee community by the imperial rulers served to transform their status from being a minority group into that of a significant one within the general socio-political milieu, while also reiterating a sense of association amongst the members of the community itself. This was particularly true of the Parsee women. Anna Harriet Leonowens classified them as 'remarkably good looking girls'. She paints a rather exotic picture of Parsee families where beautiful half walled women are encircled with noble looking fathers and number less sons. Adoring their physical features she speaks of the Parsee women as, 'fair complexioned with a delicate brunette pinch, with large eyes in regular features' (Sen, 2008, p.56). In the familial space also, these women appeared to be in a much more honourable position than the Hindu or Muslim ones, since they could venture out in the streets in open carriages and freely take a stroll in the bazaars. Their entry and participation within the public sphere<sup>iv</sup> was much sooner and more evident in comparison to other native women.

The women of the Parsee community also enjoyed a relatively progressive status as compared to those within the Hindu and Muslim communities. They were not required either to stringently observe *purdah* or to segregate themselves entirely from everyday society. Regardless of whether these women were married, unmarried, or widowed they possessed rights and protections that were often unavailable to women in various other communities. However, the patriarchal Parsees and the Panchayet (the community council of the Parsees) placed a burden of responsibility, thinly veiled through coercion, on those who were considered to be associated with upholding community standards in close proximity. In their community, the women were viewed as potent symbols or indicators of the internal well-being of the

community, reflecting upon their importance both within the community itself and to the outsiders.

As far as educating their women was concerned, Mary Francis Billington suggests that the Parsees were a shrewd race who had the ability to foresee long term gains and therefore became the rulers of the trade. In advocating for social change within the Parsee community, the members of the community aligned themselves with new influences. The coming of a formal educational system in India was traditionally credited to the influences from the West, and the Parsees emerged as the forerunners in coopting themselves within the culture of the West. They had been successful in training native girls to become doctors, assistant surgeons and hospital assistants. With respect to a certain core location, Bombay had become the centre for their swiftest strides to “mitigate present suffering and also to show possibilities to other women of a remunerative and honourable career” (Billington, 2021, p.95).

The Secretary of the Parsi Girls’ School Association, named Nowrozjee Furdoonjee along with various other reformist Parsees, campaigned extensively for the education of females. To them, the practice of educating women was seen as a logical extension of education, and for a select others, it was viewed as a crucial step towards the liberation of women within the Indian society. Those who had always viewed education as a liberating force to be embraced rather than feared were responsible for spearheading the movement for the educational empowerment of the Parsee women. These women benefitted tremendously from the Elphinstone schools and thus a generation was created that came to see the introduction of education for women as an essential component of the community’s social and moral progress. The Parsee reformers exhibited the leadership that they assumed in shaping the social and cultural landscape of Bombay and as an extension, of India, by championing the cause of female education, despite severe public opposition.

### **The Muslim Woman in Question**

The rhetoric around Indian Muslims propounded by the Anglo-Indians surpassed the language of martial races and hyper masculinity and instead, entered into a shared identification with the British as rulers with better propensity from another land, outside of the immediate, native environment. As Partha Chatterjee puts it, British rule in India was predicated on ‘colonial difference’, that is, on ‘the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group’ and the Indian

Muslims also coincided their fundamental identity at this level (Chatterjee, 1989,19). The British were thus effectively able to appropriate and contain the Muslim community, while at the same time, gradually encouraging the wide and prompt spread of Islam during colonial times. Yet, the historic rivalry between Christian and Muslim civilisations created the much anticipated friction between both groups, thus making their relationship highly complex. The stereotypes though, are seldom the best examples or authentic sources of historical evidence. Thus, the veiled women, observing *purdah*, who were isolated from the social and cultural world and harboured no impulses towards any educational accomplishment or reforms served as prototypes of frozen images locked in oriental imagination.

Her 'lived experiences' as Raymond Williams<sup>v</sup> would argue, differed tremendously from the curated images of fantasy. The actualities of the lives of Muslim women become evident in the ethnographic depictions offered by native and foreign authors who took to read the authenticities of the land and its communities. Therefore, despite the widespread accounts suggesting the backwardness of Muslim women, Katherine Mayo argues that 'Mohammedan women enjoyed greater advantages over their Hindu sisters' in some respects. The first instance being that of an absolute absence of child marriage where young children were betrothed in a religious ceremony. Secondly, there were granted freedom from enforced widowhood and the train of miseries that accompanied the same as a consequence. These women had a better constitution which made them inherently sturdier than the women from other communities. Yet, she suggests that this advantage was limited only to a life of confined existence, since the Muslim wife practically lived a life of imprisonment within the four walls of her home, rendering her reading on the Muslim women as rather complex (Mayo, 1927,108).

Fanny Parks, a contemporary of Billington, on the contrary, offers her assessment of the Muslim women as being outrightly neglectful of their learning. She observes that 'the *zenana* was a place over-shadowed with scandal and intrigue. These women obsessed over making up marriages and sought to create delight in the bustle of the ceremonies. They were devoted mothers and if got a chance, would not have allowed their children to go to schools, though the girls could still not escape the four walls of the *zenana*' (Sen, 2008, p.70). For the royalty or the *begums*, Mrs M. Weitbrecht writes that they seemed to be more stringently imprisoned than the Hindus and that one sees the least desire of knowledge among them. She

recounts an anecdote whereupon she visited a young *begum's* house only to be told by the Mohammedan wife that even if 'she decides to learn or read someday, it would be of little utility to her, since her brother, and not she can do something by it'(71).

Similarly, the *zenana* became a contested site of discourse amongst the European writers. At one point, especially during the seventeenth century, it appeared that most European writers were motivated to draw perceptions of Indian women exclusively in accordance to their communal affiliations. John Fryer, a surgeon to the East India Company suggested of the Muslim women as being more mysterious than the Hindu ones for they were kept away from the public gaze. He admonishes the antiquated notions of respectability attached to the idea of a *harem* and instead, fantasized about the repressed sexual desires of its female inhabitants (Nevile, 2000, p.12 ). Opposingly, a century later, Mary Billington who was a commissioned journalist working with the *Daily Graphic* observed that the life within the *zenana* was not entirely colourless or unspiritualised. She argued that, 'family affection enters strongly into it and blood brotherhood is a binding tie among Hindu and Mohamedans'. Another like her was Elizabeth Cooper who emphasises the control a wife exerts on her husband from "Behind Zenana Bars" and her devotion is worth emulating by the women of the west.

The *purdah*, as a symbol of respect was strictly observed by the Muslim women which became an essential part of their lives. Following the Mughal influence, many Hindu women of aristocracy also sought to embrace the tradition of *purdah*. The enigma that the veiled Muslim woman was, got reflected and eclipsed most European ideation. In majority discourses around the *purdah*, the Muslim woman was represented as an epitome of beauty and delicacy which demanded a concealed existence for her. In his work *Oriental Memoirs*, James Forbes, a former East India Company soldier observes of a high class Muslim lady of Surat as 'being one of the greatest beauties he ever beheld'(12).

Many white women on the other hand, especially the ones who travelled to the nineteenth century colonial India from a newly emancipated feminist Europe, held a different notion with regards to the *purdah* system. Most of the Victorian women finding the practice rather limiting and downright patriarchal. Mary Frances Billington notes that the Muslim and Hindu women were 'interpellated', to borrow Louis Althusser's<sup>vi</sup> concept, into the patriarchal and gendered norms to contain and manipulate their existence. The Muslim community thus shared an ideologically similar, yet functionally distinct methodology with the British which

served as a tool to further imperial domination in a twofold way: first, by exploiting the external severance from the land as a method of corroborating proximity and secondly, by puncturing the loose moral fabric with respect to the women of the Muslim community in order to endorse a patronising worldview of themselves.

### **The Re-presented Hindu Wife**

James Mill argued that the Hindu women existed in a deplorable state of dependence and extreme degradation who could only be rescued by the morally superior European. The 'civilising mission' thus got extended beyond the interventions to abolish rudimentary and primitive practices like *purdah*, *sati*, child marriage and polygamy to encompass within its ambit a newfound feminist agenda propagated by the European women to emancipate their subaltern<sup>vii</sup> sisters from the orient. *The Calcutta Review* had voiced a similar sentiment in 1845: 'All natives, even the best educated among them have the most profound contempt for women and regard them as formed alone for their pleasure' (75). Such a sentiment hinted at Anglo-India's racism that was not only deep-rooted but additionally, an inevitable outcome of the colonial enterprise itself. In the 1860s G.O. Trevelyan pronounced an old cultural prejudice when he noted: 'The wide and radical difference between the views held by the respective races with regard to the weaker sex alone, forms a bar, at present inseparable, to any familiar intercourse.... [Indians]... cannot bring themselves to look upon women as better than playthings'(75).

There have been various accounts by the native and European scholars who held the view that Hindu nationalist temperament surfaced itself through the glorification of the image of an ideal Hindu wife. In the resolution to the 'woman question', as argued by Partha Chatterjee, the domestic was perceived as the divine and pious space of the nationalist male, where his women were supposed to preserve the much revered Indian *dharma*. Therefore, even though the material or the tangible, physical world might have been lost to the colonisers, the internal home created a sacred space for nationalist cohesion and as a result, national victory. Therefore, the idea of the modern, educated housewife was always tied to the older patriarchal imagination of the mythical divine figure of the Hindu goddess, *Lakshmi*.

*Lakshmi* as a prototype of the ideal Hindu wife combined submission with loyalty. This new concept of womanhood or the *nabina* (new woman) was a fine blending of the self-sacrificing Hindu wife and the Victorian helpmate (Sarkar, 2001, p.71). Such divine descriptions that became synonymous with the Hindu woman and her tragic role in a Hindu family as well as the nation were heavily condemned by Katherine Mayo in her work *Mother India*. She observes that the Hindu wife was not just majorly poor but also sick, ignorant and helpless. Additionally, this was also the religion where class and caste barriers inflicted themselves most profusely. Mary Martha Sherwood paints a rather bleak picture of the elderly women of lower classes whom she says are ‘fearful to look at for their skin is shrivelled and hanging loose the lips thin and black, and the whole expression that of persons hardened by misery . . . and without hope having in use exhausted all that life can give, and through this rapid exhaustion having grown old before the youth of an honourable English wife could have begun to fade’ (Sen, 2008 p.115).

Another European memsahib named Marian Postans, talks about the *parbutti dhobun*, the young washer woman who fascinated the writer for chanting *Mahratta* songs at the sunset hour while she is surrounded by her companions master about the Indian wells. The picturesque quality of scantily dressed women folk invoked the exotic oriental figure in the colonial imagination. At the same time Indrani Sen notes that a contemporary of Billington, named Mary Carpenter expresses her astonishment and resentment at women bathing publicly at the landing place of a river without feeling akin to feminine delicacy while they leave a greater part of their bodies uncovered in the most barbaric way (34).

Therefore, for the Englishwoman it was a part of her imperial burden to enlighten her ignorant sisters in India. At the outset, the missionaries took upon themselves to educate and proselytize Indian women. There was an overwhelming urge to civilize and modernize the ‘other’ who was oppressed, illiterate and oblivious of the empowered way of life. Geraldine Forbes observes that the emancipationists were enamoured with their civilising mission, and “influential British writers condemned Indian religion, culture and society for their rules and customs regarding women” (Forbes ,1996, p.23). But the unwavering Hindu offered his resistance to such improvisations within their age-old customs. Hence the British had to ensure that their religiosity was not entirely dispensed with if the changes had to be put into what Karl Marx termed as ‘praxis’. In the construction of the new-age woman and womanhood, therefore, it

was the orthodox image of the Hindu woman as a carrier of the burdens of traditional gender roles, whose identity was carefully embellished by education and the adorned ideals of novelty borrowed from the West.

## Conclusion

A significant component of research rests in the reimagining of fixated discourses. Therefore, a similar approach is beneficial with respect to the theorisation and tracing of the feminist historiography. Such an analysis holds especially true in the case of colonial countries like India. In taking the nineteenth century as a reference point for mapping the interactions between European and Indian women, the 'woman' of India gets established as a symbol of reified communal culture and identity. She occupied a subject position that established itself as a moment of negotiation between the heightened nationalist consciousness on the one hand and the vastly expanding Empire during the 1800s.

The emergence of peculiar beliefs about the native women stemmed from the need to unite the otherwise scattered 'santans'<sup>viii</sup> or the children of the mother (India), as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee would put in *Anandamath*. This collided with the emergence and spread of novel feminist sentiments, though in their nascent stages, brought in by the Victorian women who travelled to India at the time. They attempted a reinforcing of the ideas of women emancipation and rights for women in the land of the 'other'. In doing so, the white women got concurrently involved within the imperial endeavours in numerous ways. At the same time, there prevailed an overarching sense of traditionalism within the Anglo-Indian community owing to an amalgamation of Victorian beliefs embedded in colonial precariousness that tried to tactfully incorporate the hitherto established patriarchal patterns of the Indian cultural setup. There was a significant thrust given to the debates and discussions around the native woman. The stimulated response towards her fate resulted in the emergence of various myths and counter-myths revolving around her subject-position that got reflected in the diversity of discourses in circulation.

Many avid readers and writers who actively participated in such negotiations were either the few native or European men and women of letters. They expressed their concerns and observations through popular media spaces like journals, newspapers or self-financed pamphlets. Editions like those of *The Calcutta Review*, writings of social reformers like Ram



Mohan Roy, women activists like Pandita Ramabai or English women writers like Flora Annie Steele and Maud Diver occupied the literary space that situated Indian women at the core of their efforts (Billington, 2021, p. 128). Conservative feminists like Annie Beasnt and Margaret Noble (later Sister Nivedita), who was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, celebrated the idea female prototypes of Sita, Savitri and Satyawati from the Indian myths only to be inspired by the devotion of the Indian wife. For them these women were worthy of being emulated by the women of the west who were selfish and too fast paced. The liberal feminists like Mary Carpenter and Katherine Mayo, on the other hand completely rejected and opposed such ideas.

### Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> The term coined by Antonio Gramsci in his work, *Prison Notebooks*, defined as dominance of one group over another, supported by legitimate ideas and norms of the powerful.
- <sup>ii</sup> Edward Said in his seminal work, *Orientalism* discusses the binary relationship between the Orient and the Occident by establishing them as the 'other' and the 'self' respectively.
- <sup>iii</sup> Homi K. Bhabha defines 'ambivalence' as coexistence of opposing attitudes in specific environments in "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse".
- <sup>iv</sup> For Jurgen Habermas, *Public Sphere* is the mediating tool between the state and the society in a democracy, which implies that all opinion is circulated and formed through it.
- <sup>v</sup> Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution*, speaks about 'lived experiences' as being authentic realities of people versus the descriptive ones.
- <sup>vi</sup> Interpellation refers to the ways in which cultural ideas get settled in our minds to adjust our notions towards believing in the finality of them, as suggested by Louis Althusser in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation".
- <sup>vii</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" defines the subaltern as the repressed voices excluded from mainstream discourses.
- <sup>viii</sup> In Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's, *Anandamath*, the 'santans' are the Hindu sons who are being urged to actively participate in the nationalist movement.

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## Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Reproductive Health among Tribal Women: An Empirical Study from India

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### Abstract

*There has been lesser improvements in access to prenatal care and postpartum medical assistance have been experienced by tribal women, notably those who reside in northern, central, and eastern India. Therefore, women's awareness/knowledge, attitudes, and actions about reproductive health must be prioritised to improve health outcomes. This study examines indigenous women's reproductive health knowledge, attitudes, and practices in the Kashmir Region. Additionally, this study looks into the relationships between socio-demographic factors and knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to reproductive health. This cross-sectional study included 210 individuals from three Northern Indian districts. Most responders of all ages were unaware of STDs. Regardless of age, marriage duration, and education, most women knew about pregnancy and childbirth. Most women reported menstruation knowledge. All groups have a considerable education-marriage duration gap. Most respondents across all age groups and marriage duration reported not discussing reproductive health with others. Contraceptive attitudes were negative across age, education, and marriage duration. Most respondents across age groups and marriage did not practice reproductive hygiene. Logistic regression shows that age predicts reproductive health knowledge in women. Age does not predict reproductive health attitudes and practices in women. Marriage duration also predicts reproductive health knowledge among women. Education predicts reproductive health knowledge and attitudes in women. It doesn't predict women's reproductive health practices.*

**Keywords:** Tribal women; women; reproductive health; knowledge; awareness; practices.

## Introduction

India's social diversity includes a significant portion of the tribal population, whose number is second to that of the African mainland. They make up 8.6 per cent of the nation's overall population, according to the 2011 Census (Ghosh et al., 2021, 89; Government of India, 2001). These tribes are reported to have a high prevalence of poverty, illiteracy, substandard living circumstances, low personal cleanliness, and unhealthy health-seeking behaviours (Sahoo and Pradhan, 2021, 5). Additionally, women in these tribal societies are more prone to reproductive and sexual issues due to early marriage age, consanguinity, high parity, and other behavioural variables (Bala and Thiruselvakumar, 2009, 283; Rao et al., 2012, 627). According to Khan et al. (2009, 309), "reproductive health care" is the collection of approaches, strategies, and mentalities that support the welfare and health of the reproductive system. Complex biological, social, economic, and demographic aspects, such as a woman's caste-based tradition, social standing, and age at marriage, all impact her health state (Rogers et al., 2010, 141).

The women from tribal regions, particularly in India's northern, central, and eastern areas, have seen the slowest advancements in access to prenatal care and postpartum medical aid (Bathala, 2015, 12). This is brought on by gender-associated barriers that prevent many women from having the prospects and empowerment they need to reach their full potential (UNDP, 2016). Women's health was emphasised less in India's tribal areas due to superstitious beliefs, illiteracy, poverty, and orthodox traditions. In general, tribal population groupings had a more severe tendency (Khanna et al., 2005, 93). The health of the "tribal" community in India is generally acknowledged to be very poor, with deficiencies in hygienic conditions, personal sanitation, and health edification (Rogers et al., 2010, 141). The Scheduled Tribes were also found to have a limited understanding of reproductive issues (Khanna et al., 2005, 94).

Furthermore, several research has revealed that women from these socially disadvantaged groups are less aware of hygienic menstruation habits and more likely to experience preventable reproductive health disorders (Mudi et al., 2023, 23; Nagar and Aimol, 2010, 29; Shah et al., 2013, 207). Moreover, women are particularly susceptible to adverse consequences due to low awareness and practices, including high-risk sexual activities, inefficient use of birth control measures, STIs, sexual-related abuse, unintended pregnancies, and risky miscarriages (Hamdanieh et al., 2021, 7). According to

studies, inadequate hygiene and a lack of understanding about reproduction are likely causes of health issues like STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) (Sahoo and Pradhan, 2021, 267). Therefore, having appropriate and accurate knowledge among tribal is essential for future reproductive-related activities and behaviour (Saha et al., 2007, 7; Salehin, 2012). Hence, awareness/knowledge, attitude and practices concerning reproductive health amongst women must be prioritised to achieve better health outcomes.

On the other hand, less data is available regarding “tribal” women's reproductive health in India (Mudi et al., 2023, 34; Sahoo and Pradhan, 2020, 403). To properly develop and implement appropriate health measures, it is necessary to have a thorough grasp of the many reproductive health characteristics of tribal women and their unique health needs. To better prepare for the welfare of tribal women, it is necessary to do research on their health that is specific to the region. In light of the abovementioned setting, this study investigates knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning reproductive health amongst tribal women in the Kashmir Region. Moreover, this study also investigates the association between “knowledge”, “attitude” and “practices” concerning “reproductive” health and socio-demographic variables.

### **Review of the relevant literature**

The UN (United Nations, 1995, 2) has defined “reproductive” health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of reproductive disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes”. According to Bhardwaj and Tungdim (2010, 3), reproductive health encompasses the symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of diseases and conditions that impact the female reproductive system. The rights of people of both genders to be well-informed concerning healthy “reproductive” practices and developments, such as information about harmless, efficient, affordable, and adequate methods for regulating fertility, as well as men's and women's access to proper “health care” facilities to enjoy such rights, is emphasised as the fundamental quality of reproductive health (Sunil and Pillai, 2010). This right is emphasised as the definition of reproductive health's fundamental quality. According to Middleberg (2003, 27), the reproductive health of Indian tribal peoples is poorly maintained and is tied to the socio-economic circumstances of both individuals and households. The “reproductive health” of a population

is a reliable indication of the overall health of that population. According to Shankar and Thamilarasan (2003, 37), the “reproductive health” of a population is centred on the woman because of the reproductive function that she plays during pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and all stages of parenting. Women are also at the heart of many societal and daily economic activities in “tribal” communities, which calls for shared interactions with the factors that support reproductive health, and these activities require women to be at the centre of these activities. Specifically, the KAP about the reproductive health of tribal women is the focus of the current study, which aims to understand the overall condition of the reproductive health of tribal people across India.

Raising awareness of “reproductive health” is a significant contributor to the education of all individuals, particularly women, on sexual and “reproductive health”. According to Ghosh et al. (2021, 12), it contributes to the prevention of HIV/AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted infections. As a result, it makes it easier to deliver a healthy child and protects both the mother and the child from infectious diseases. According to Akhouri et al. (2017, 4), it provides extensive information regarding topics such as the beginning of pregnancy, sterility, birth control alternatives, pregnancy, postpartum care for both the mother and the infant, and other related topics. The findings of Saha et al. (2007, 8) research have also demonstrated that a positive attitude towards reproductive issues is associated with improved “reproductive health” in women. This study refers to their thoughts and ideas regarding the “reproductive health” of women who are members of tribal communities. Any safe procedures that should be followed for women's health are included in the practices that pertain to reproductive health.

## Methods

This work used a cross-sectional design involving 210 tribes from three districts in the Northern Region of India. The participants were women who had been married for at least one year. The questionnaire was used to collect the responses from the respondents concerning their demographic variables as well as the aspects of knowledge, awareness and practices concerning reproductive health. Before obtaining responses, their consent was sought before the survey was conducted. The sampling method used was snowball sampling. Questions related to knowledge, attitude and practices concerning reproductive health were adapted from the work of Gaferi et al. (2018, 12) and Liu et al. (2023, 9).

## **Analysis**

Descriptive analysis in SPSS 26.0 was used to analyse the data collected. Chi-square test statistics were used to assess the differences in KAP (knowledge awareness and practices) concerning reproductive health across socio-demographic characteristics (age of the respondents, duration of marriage and education). Logistic regression was also used to examine the association between (age, duration of marriage and education) and KAP concerning reproductive health. We used the logistic regression technique to obtain both crude and adjusted odds ratios to estimate the magnitude of each independent variable's impact on the study variable and to confirm whether or not the differences provided by the various categories of the various explanatory variables taken into consideration in our study are statistically significant.

Most respondents were 18-25 years old, most were married between 1 to 5 years, most had no formal education, and most had income up to Rs. 10,000.

Regarding sexually transmitted diseases (also known as STDs), the vast majority of respondents, regardless of age group, lacked any understanding regarding these conditions. In addition, there is a real contrast between the younger and older age groups. Most respondents reported being aware of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) regardless of the length of their marriages. Compared with illiterate women, educated women had a significantly higher level of awareness regarding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Most respondents indicated they knew about the subject of pregnancy and childbirth. This was true across all age groups, marriage durations, and education levels. In terms of menstruation, women who were older than 25 years old reported having more excellent knowledge than women who were younger than 25 years old. In the groups that had been married for longer and had higher levels of education, most respondents claimed to have information about menstruation. In addition, there is a considerable disparity between all categories regarding the length of marriage and educational attainment.

Regarding the conversation with others regarding reproductive health, most respondents across all age groups and duration of marriage said that they do not engage in such conversations with their partners or other people. On the other hand, regarding education, educated women claimed that they discuss such concerns with others, in contrast to the group of illiterate women. Regarding their attitudes

regarding contraceptives, the vast majority of respondents, regardless of age, level of education, or length of marriage, stated that they do not have a good attitude toward contraceptive measures. In addition, each group has a considerable difference in age, the length of time spent married, and the amount of education received.

The practices that pertain to women's reproductive health are broken down by age group, length of marriage, and level of education. Concerning reproductive hygiene, most respondents, regardless of age or length of marriage, stated that they do not care to follow it regularly. This was the consensus across all age groups. On the other hand, in terms of education, educated women indicated that they engage in safe reproductive practices, in contrast to the group of illiterate women. In response to whether or not they seek the counsel of professionals, the vast majority of respondents, regardless of age or length of marriage, stated that they do not do so.

On the other hand, regarding education, educated women claimed that they sought specialists' counsel, in contrast to illiterate women. Regarding contraceptive methods, the vast majority of women across all age groups, marriage duration groups, and educational groups stated that they do not use any form of birth control. In addition, each group has a considerable disparity regarding age, the length of time spent married, and the amount of education received.

The results of an adjusted logistic regression analysis about KAP for reproductive health and sociodemographic variables show that age is a predictor of knowledge regarding reproductive health among the women respondents, with an odds ratio of 1.6 and a significance level of less than 0.05. On the other hand, age is not a reliable predictor of attitude and behaviour among women respondents about reproductive health ( $P > 0.05$ ). It can also be seen that the length of a marriage is a significant predictor of knowledge regarding reproductive health among the women who responded to the survey ( $OR = 1.7$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). However, neither attitude nor behaviour about reproductive health is significantly influenced by the length of marriage among the women respondents ( $P > 0.05$ ). Education was a predictor of both knowledge ( $OR=1.8$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ) and attitude ( $OR=1.8$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ) about reproductive



health among the women who responded to the survey. On the other hand, it does not accurately predict practice about reproductive health among the women who responded ( $P>0.05$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

According to Salehin et al. (2012, 5), when it comes to nations like India, which have a sizeable population of tribal people, one of the most fascinating subjects that has emerged over the past ten years is the reproductive health of tribal people. Additionally, studies in this area have been promoted as a result of the efforts made by the “Government of India” to improve the reproductive health of women who belong to tribal communities. Because this work fills a huge vacuum in research about KAP on the “reproductive health” of tribal women, it was carried out in the tribal parts of Kashmir.

The findings show that most respondents across all ages did not know about STDs. This means tribal women have less awareness about STDs, irrespective of age. These findings align with a study by Salehin et al. (2012, 3). The reason could be attributed to the cause that tribal populations have less awareness about reproductive health due to less development and education among women. Regarding marriage duration, most of the respondents reported awareness of STDs. This means that with experience, women are aware of STDs. About education, most educated women were more aware of compared to illiterate women about STDs. Concerning pregnancy and childbirth, most respondents across all age groups, duration of marriage and education reported they knew about the subject. This means that irrespective of their socio-demographics, women are aware of pregnancy and childbirth issues as the knowledge may be transferred from generation to generation. Sanneving et al. (2013, 5) also found similar results in the Indian tribal population. Concerning menstruation, women above 25 reported more knowledge compared to the age groups below 25 years old. For education and marriage duration groups, most of them reported that they knew about menstruation. Moreover, there is a significant difference between marriage duration and education across all groups. This means socio-demographics influence KAP amongst tribal women.

Concerning discussion with others about “reproductive health”, most of the respondents across all age groups and duration of marriage reported that they do not discuss such issues with others. This means

the topic of reproductive health is still considered taboo and is looked at with a conservative mindset (Mudi et al., 2023, 28). However, for education, educated women reported that they discuss such issues with others in contrast to the illiterate group. Sanneving et al. (2013, 6) also reported similar findings on a tribal population. Concerning attitudes towards contraceptives, most of them across age, education, and marriage duration reported that they do not hold positive attitudes about contraceptive measures. Paul et al. (2017, 322) also found a similar attitude among tribals. Moreover, all groups differ significantly in age, marriage duration, and education.

Concerning reproductive hygiene, most respondents across all age groups and duration of marriage reported that they do not practice it routinely. Maji (2021, 185) also reported low reproductive hygiene amongst tribal women. However, for education, educated women reported that they practice safe reproductive practices in contrast to the illiterate group. Concerning seeking advice from experts, most respondents across all age groups and duration of marriage reported that they do not seek any advice. However, educated women reported seeking expert advice compared to the illiterate group for education. Concerning the use of contraceptives, most women across all age groups, marriage duration groups and education groups reported that they do not use contraceptive measures. Daniel et al. (2008, 191) also reported a conservative attitude concerning contraceptives among tribal women. Moreover, all groups significantly differ in age, marriage duration and education.

The logistic regression findings show that age predicts knowledge concerning reproductive health amongst women respondents. However, age does not predict attitude and practice concerning reproductive health amongst women respondents. It can also be observed that the duration of marriage does predict knowledge concerning reproductive health amongst women respondents. This means that with age and increasing duration of the marriage, tribal women also learn facts about their reproductive health. Liu et al. (2023, 4) also find similar findings. However, the duration of marriage does not predict attitudes and practices concerning reproductive health amongst women respondents. It can also be observed that education predicts knowledge and attitude concerning reproductive health amongst women respondents. However, it does not predict practice concerning reproductive health amongst

women respondents. This can be due to the conservative culture amongst tribals and the negative perspective of contraceptives, irrespective of education.

### **Recommendations**

Programs should be established in conjunction with essential stakeholders from tribal communities, considering the distinctive culture and customs of tribal communities, to improve reproductive health among tribal women. The availability of additional medical treatments for native women should be increased. It is imperative that those working in healthcare, including nurses and other medical personnel, acquire the required training to improve the “knowledge” and “attitudes” of tribal women regarding their reproductive health and other reproductive issues. There should be adequate resources available to primary healthcare practitioners in tribal areas so that they can educate women about reproductive health. Increasing the frequency of education and awareness camps in these areas is essential to improve the “reproductive health” of women who belong to Indigenous communities. In addition, the findings indicate that providing Indigenous women with a greater capacity for formal education can significantly improve their reproductive health.

### **Future Directions**

Although the sample is exclusively female, future research may include the partners of women and assess their KAP concerning their reproductive health. More participants from both urban and rural locations might be included in future studies. Additional research may be conducted across India, not just in the major cities and the countryside. Future research should examine the mediating and moderating effects of many factors, such as demographic traits. Given that the current research was cross-sectional and neglected causal relationships between study variables, longitudinal and qualitative investigations may help elucidate any causality correlations among factors and advance knowledge of their relationships.

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## BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: CHALLENGING SOCIETAL NORMS AND LEGAL APPROACHES TO MARITAL RAPE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS OFFENSE

Satyendra Kumar Pandey & Himani Bisht

### Abstract

*The issue of marital rape, often referred to as a "silent injustice" has long been a contentious issue, overshadowed by societal taboos and misconceptions surrounding the sanctity of the institution of marriage. This article delves into the pressing issue of marital rape and the ongoing struggle to recognize it as a flagrant violation of human rights. Both domestic legal systems and international treaties consider marital rape to be a violation of human rights. It goes against the values of autonomy and bodily integrity as endorsed by various international conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Universal Declaration of Human Rights and honest interactions are frequently hampered by deeply ingrained societal views that are intertwined with ideas of marital privacy and cultural prejudices. Thus, the fight to get marital rape recognised as a violation of human rights is an important task. To empower survivors and push for legal reforms, this article addresses the severity of marital rape from the human rights perspective so that such a norm can be created in the society which can eliminate this pressing issue by examining marital rape from the human rights perspective.*

**Keywords:** Marital rape, Human rights, societal norms, Legal approaches, Closed-door dynamics.

### Introduction

Marriage, an esteemed institution symbolizing unity and shared dreams, occupies a special place within the fabric of society. Within the sacred bond of marriage, where two hearts intertwine in a union of love and commitment, whereas a profound significance is bestowed upon the offspring born to the woman. In the eyes of the law, the child born to a married couple is inherently recognized as the legal child of both partners, embodying the enduring bond and shared responsibilities of matrimonial union (Priyanka N. Ruwali 2018, p.1). A valid marriage bestows certain legally recognized rights and

obligations as well as legalizes a social position (Rahim Shinwari, 2011, p.2). In the tapestry of love and partnership woven by marriage, there exists a hidden veil of privacy, shielding certain realities from public scrutiny for centuries. Among these concealed truths lies the harrowing spectre of marital rape, a dark and unsettling reality that persists within the sanctity of marriage. This research paper embarks on a journey into the labyrinth of marital rape, advocating vehemently for its recognition as a deplorable violation of human rights. With a fervent desire to ignite meaningful discourse, this paper aims to unravel the complexities surrounding marital rape, urging for the dismantling of entrenched norms, policies, and legal frameworks that perpetuate such abuse within the institution of marriage. It is a solemn acknowledgement that violence against women constitutes a blatant infringement upon their fundamental human rights. In our quest for justice and equality, global agreements must align with the spirit of constitutional guarantees, ensuring they do not conflict with basic rights (Kallakuru and Soni 2018, p.144). Any interpretation must encompass these provisions to advance the objectives of the guarantee and expand its reach, fostering a world where the sanctity of marriage is not a shield from violence, but a beacon of love, respect, and equality for all (*Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, 1997, p.241). India must abide by the international laws that it has accepted, including (UDHR and CEDAW), it provides key rights such as-

- Right to dignity (UDHR, 1948).
- Right to life, liberty and security of person (UDHR, 1948).
- Right to equality before the law and equal protection of the laws (UDHR, 1948).
- Right to protection against torture (UDHR, 1948).
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, (DEVAW)

Thus, any individual, group or community at the international and national level must take necessary steps to eliminate prejudice against women and also to amend the existing laws, rules, traditions and customs that discriminate against women is necessary. The social and cultural behaviours of both genders need to change to eliminate prejudices, traditions, and other practices rooted in the notion of one gender being superior or predetermined roles for them. Indian peoples also have a responsibility to uphold and advance the rights of women are mentioned in the UDHR and ICCPR (Ojilere 2015, p.63). Furthermore, India is obligated by CEDAW to repeal exemption 2 of section 375, thereby taking critical steps to eradicate gender discrimination against women. During the year 1993, marital rape

was recognised as violence against women. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), it constitutes a breach of women's inherent human rights as recognized by international law (DEVAW, 1979, p.2). In other words, according to Article 1 of the CEDAW, discrimination against women is prohibited regardless of their marital status. It encompasses any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on gender, with the aim or effect of ensuring both women and men can equally enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms in various spheres, all premised on the principle of gender equality. Exception II to Section 375 (Indian Penal Code), infringes upon women's liberties, human rights, right to life, and privacy, denying them the opportunity to safeguard these fundamental rights (DEVAW, 1979, p.2).

#### Historical Context and Hidden Traumas

While still a relatively novel legal concept, marital rape continues to pose a significant and enduring challenge. Throughout much of history, the marital bond implied a perpetual agreement to sexual relations on the part of the wife, leaving no room for the recognition of rape within marriage and providing wives with no legal avenue for recourse. This notion was rarely questioned, as it was believed that once consent was given by the wife to her husband, it could not be retracted, thereby precluding any accusations of rape against the husband (Ross 2015, p.3). This doctrine of implied consent was famously articulated by Sir Matthew Hale, the Chief Justice of Britain during the 17th century, further entrenching the idea of marital (Anderson 2003, p.1477). The principle advocated by Lord Hill served to effectively exempt marital rape from legal scrutiny, lacking any firm legal foundation. Reflecting on the historical trajectory of marital rape, Jill Ellen Hasde asserts that following the pivotal Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, feminists launched a vigorous campaign targeting not only sodomy within marriage but also broader issues of sexual autonomy and gender equality (Hasday, 2000, p.1377). This research paper aims to dismantle this historical facade and shed light on the underlying traumas it conceals. Marital rape encompasses not only the heinous act itself but also the enduring psychological wounds inflicted upon its victims. In addition to immediate harm, there is a profound breach of trust, individual autonomy, and personal agency. Survivors frequently grapple with feelings of betrayal, guilt, and isolation within a relational context that should ideally foster kindness and mutual respect. Beyond the individual suffering endured by victims, the continued impunity and cycle of silence surrounding marital rape ultimately undermine societal goals (Sharma 2023, p.7).

## Research Aim and Structure

This paper endeavours to undertake a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon of marital rape regarding violations of human rights. It seeks to illuminate an obscured injustice inherent in marital rape by delving into its historical, cultural, legal, and societal dimensions. The overarching objective is to advocate for the recognition of marital rape as a grave infringement of human rights and to foster a deeper understanding of its far-reaching impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Traditionally, marriage has been construed as a contractual arrangement imbued with rights and obligations, often skewed in favour of the husband. Within this framework, the notion of a woman's perpetual and irrevocable consent to sexual activity within marriage has endured, perpetuated by patriarchal norms that sustain the acceptance of marital rape and perpetuate a culture of silence around the issue. Discussions about intimate relationships are frequently hindered by a veil of privacy drawn over marriages, allowing marital rape to persist unchecked and disregarded. Survivors of marital rape endure severe repercussions that transcend physical harm, impacting their emotional and psychological well-being. The legal response to marital rape is a complex and multifaceted subject shaped by societal attitudes, historical context, and cultural norms. This paper explores legal perspectives on marital rape, highlighting the disparities among nations and advocating for urgent legal reforms to eradicate this egregious violation of human rights.

## Human Rights Violation and the Framework for Justice

The campaign against marital rape is essentially a campaign to safeguard human rights. This endeavour is grounded in the principles of human dignity and equality, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to a life free from violence is explicitly outlined in international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which prohibits any form of violence against women, encompassing domestic violence, as unlawful conduct. These international agreements force us to acknowledge that human rights and welfare cannot be surrendered in the name of marital custom (Randall and Venkatesh 2015, p.177). Legal Environments and Accountability a complex combination of cultural values, gender dynamics, and legal traditions has resulted in a wide range of legal responses to marital rape in many jurisdictions. Old-fashioned ideas that hold that consent is a necessary component of marriage still exist in some legal systems. Such exceptions violate the fundamental values of individual liberty and consent and support a violent culture. This Article emphasises the critical need for legal change to close the gap

between changing cultural perceptions and legal acknowledgement. It promotes legislation that expressly criminalises marital rape to give survivors the same legal protection as those who experience non-marital sexual assault. The problem of marital rape is against social and cultural norms. Patriarchal systems ingrained gender norms, and the idea that a husband has unalienable sexual rights have all contributed to the normalisation of sexual violence in marriage (Saunders et al. 2023, p.1999). Such beliefs encourage survivors to remain silent, suffer stigma, and live in isolation, which frequently keeps them from seeking assistance or justice.

#### Marital rape and international Human Rights Law

The United Nations is consistently condemns violence against women, whether occurring in private or public spheres, as a blatant violation or negation of women's "fundamental freedoms". It is widely acknowledged that violence targeting women constitutes a direct affront to their inherent human rights. Since the early 1990s, acts of violence within marriages, including rape, have been acknowledged as violations of human rights. Within this framework, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) elucidates women's rights by international legal norms (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993, p.2). International law prohibits discrimination, exploitation and sexual violence based on gender. Similar affirmations were reiterated in the Beijing Declaration of 1995 during the Fourth World Conference on Women's Status, wherein rape, domestic violence, and marital exploitation were declared unlawful (Vereinte Nationen, 1996, p.218). In recent years, mounting evidence suggests that sexual violence against women constitutes a breach of human rights. It extends to all rights protected by law that impede the enjoyment of life, liberty, equality, autonomy, Safety, health and proper working and the right of circumstances also includes (Meyer, 2016, pp.563-565). Hence, it follows that marital rape inherently infringes upon each of these fundamental rights. Various reports, gatherings, resolutions, and directives advocate for the criminalization of marital rape by states. The report of Beijing Ending the Abuse against Women, reiterates the call for action, emphasizing the need to treat all forms of violence against women and girls as criminal acts (Louise Olsson & Karin Sundström, 2013, p.49).

#### Social Denial, Silence, and Stigma

The issue of marital rape is a very hot one which involves social norms, legal challenges and misuse of the law. Providing justice to the victims of the said crime as well as preventing misuse of the law is quite challenging. In the context of marital rape, it is very important to establish a properly balanced

framework of law so that justice can be provided to all the parties affected and the dignity of the woman can be protected along with her gender equality. To ensure equality and justice, it is very important to establish a society free from marital rape (J. K. Sharma 2023, p.3). The normalization of marital rape is fuelled by a culture of silence, stigma, and societal denial (Atrey 2023, p.77). Survivors are often reluctant to disclose incidents due to fear of judgment, victim-blaming, and the belief that their experiences are inconsequential. This pervasive silence perpetuates the cycle of abuse, enabling perpetrators to evade accountability. Moreover, societal denial of marital rape contributes to the inadequate recognition of its prevalence, leaving survivors without adequate support systems and discouraging them from seeking justice. Efforts to challenge the acceptance of marital rape require a comprehensive transformation of societal attitudes and cultural norms. Education and awareness campaigns can debunk the myths that perpetuate marital rape and empower survivors to speak out. By fostering open discussions and reshaping community outlooks, it's feasible to shift the narrative surrounding marital rape from acceptance to unequivocal condemnation as a breach of essential human rights.

#### **The Battle for Recognition of Marital Rape as a Human Rights Violation**

In numerous regions globally, efforts to acknowledge marital rape as a violation of human rights are ongoing and contentious. Sexual activity or other sexual activities carried out throughout a marriage without one spouse's consent are referred to as marital rape. It is regarded as a kind of sexual violence since it violates a person's bodily autonomy and personal dignity. The following are some crucial points regarding the declaration of marital rape as a violation of human rights:

- I. Historical Perspective:** Concept of implied consent within marriage has historically been used to overlook or legalise marital rape. Many legal systems believed that since marriage included a lifelong agreement to sexual intercourse, a husband couldn't rape his wife. Over time, this viewpoint has steadily changed (Sonal Garg & Nivedita Singh, 2022, p.3).
- II. International standards for human rights:** The Human Rights Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) and the UN Charter, along with various international human rights agreements, safeguard rights such as equality within marital unions. These standards have significantly contributed to the advancement of the concept that marital rape constitutes a violation of human rights (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979, p.2).
- III. Changing Legal Environment:** Numerous countries have revised their laws to outlaw marital rape and provide victims with legal remedies. Nonetheless, the legal standing of marital rape

varies greatly by region. Even while there are strong legal prohibitions in place in some countries, it is not formally illegal in others.

**IV. Advocacy and Activism:** The promotion of marital rape knowledge and the advancement of legal change have been greatly aided by civil society organisations, human rights defenders and women's rights campaigners. To question societal norms and discriminatory laws, they have run campaigns, planned protests, and participated in public discourse.

**V. Challenges and Resistance:** Because of cultural, religious, or traditional attitudes that emphasise male authority in marriage, marital rape is often not criminalised. Critics contend that making marital rape a crime will weaken family values and jeopardise the sanctity of marriage.

**VI. Health and Psychological Impacts:** Survivors of marital rape may experience significant physical, psychological, and emotional effects. Physical harm, unintended pregnancies, STDs, and long-term trauma are all possible outcomes.

**VII. Global Progress:** There is still work to be done to establish universal recognition of marital rape as a human rights violation, even though great progress has been made in many nations. Advocates keep pushing for legislative changes, educational initiatives, and public awareness campaigns to alter perceptions and lessen the frequency of marital rape (Tsion Hagos Woldu, 2017, p.64).

**Towards Change: Legal Reforms and Support Mechanisms regarding marital rap**

To successfully identify and eradicate marital rape, legal reforms and support systems are crucial. To protect survivors and hold offenders accountable, robust legal and support systems are needed when marital rape occurs. This is because it constitutes a major violation of a person's bodily autonomy and consent. In this regard, the following are some crucial thoughts and actions to take:

**I. Criminalization of Marital Rape:** It is not considered a full-blown crime in many countries. All forms of sexual assault committed during a marriage should be made illegal, excluding any extenuating circumstances (Pooja Arora, 2022, p.264).

**II. Elimination of Marital exclusions:** Historically, there have been exclusions for marital rape in some legal systems. It ensures that no one is immune from the law and that everyone has the right to consent inside their marriages; these exemptions ought to be eliminated.

- III. Informed Consent Requirement:** Laws should make it clear that any sexual activity without express and voluntary consent is illegal and should emphasise the significance of informed consent within marital partnership. (Amita Pitre 2021, p.471).
- IV. Reporting Is Not Time Limited:** Removing reporting deadlines for marital rape will give survivors more time to process what happened and pursue legal action.
- V. Restraining orders and protective orders:** To protect survivors from additional abuse and to provide them with the opportunity to seek legal protection from abusive partners, implement protective orders and restraining orders.
- VI. Legal professionals' education and training:** Provide instruction on how to properly and sensitively handle cases of marital rape to judges, attorneys, and law enforcement officials. The subtleties of consent and the dynamics of abusive relationships should be covered in this training (Eileen Skinnider & Ariana Qosaj-Mustafa, 2020, p.129).

**Support Mechanisms:**

- I. Counselling and crisis hotlines:** Set up counselling services and 24-hour crisis hotlines for victims of marital rape. These services ought to be available and considerate of various communities (Bhate-Deosthali, Pal, and Hogan 2021, p.61).
- II. Safe housing and shelters:** Offer survivors who need to leave abusive marriages safe housing options. Make certain that these shelters are secure, private, and ready to assist people from varied backgrounds.
- III. Legal assistance and Advocacy:** Provide survivors who want to file a lawsuit against their abusers with legal assistance services. Judicial advocates can explain survivors' rights and help them navigate the judicial system.
- IV. Support Groups:** Create support groups and other community services to help survivors connect with other people who have gone through marital rape. These organisations can offer emotional assistance and reassurance.
- V. Medical and Healthcare Services:** Provide medical care, including gathering evidence if necessary, and educate healthcare professionals on how to spot indicators of marital rape. Encourage victims to get medical and health care service (Shalini Phansalkar Joshi 2018, p.6).



- VI. Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to inform people about the value of consent in marriages, the crime of marital rape, and the availability of support resources.
- VII. Working along with NGOs and advocacy groups:** To make use of their knowledge and resources, collaborate with non-governmental organisations and advocacy groups that focus on gender-based violence.
- VIII. Economic Assistance:** Offer survivor's financial assistance programmes to assist them in becoming financially independent and lessen their reliance on abusive spouses. To effectively address marital rape, these legal reforms and support systems must be put into place. To guarantee that these systems meet the changing needs of survivors and advance a culture that places a premium on consent, safety, and justice in all interactions, it is also crucial to regularly assess and enhance them.

#### Conclusion and Suggestions

The fight to get marital rape recognised as a human rights violation is a critical issue for the entire world. To change laws, increase awareness, and support survivors, governments, civil society, and international organisations must work together. We can only hope to end the silence around this injustice and forward our efforts towards a future in which everyone's right to peace and freedom with the absence of violence and fear is acknowledged and safeguarded through these collective activities. Marital rape in the shadowy confines of domesticity, a silent epidemic persists, shrouded in societal norms and legal ambiguities. Marital rape, long relegated to the realm of taboo and silence, emerges as a potent symbol of gender inequality and systemic injustice. Our exploration into the multifaceted dimensions of marital rape reveals a sobering reality: behind closed doors, countless individuals suffer in silence, there and their voices muted by patriarchal structures and legal loopholes. As we navigate the complex landscape of marital rape, it becomes evident that addressing this egregious violation requires a multifaceted approach. Beyond mere acknowledgement, we must challenge societal norms and confront entrenched beliefs that perpetuate gender-based violence. By dismantling the patriarchal constructs that have long shielded perpetrators and silenced victims, we pave the way for a more just and equitable society. In light of our findings, we offer suggestions for policymakers, legal practitioners, and advocates alike. Governments must enact robust legal frameworks that criminalize marital rape without exception, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. This

includes the repeal of outdated laws that perpetuate marital immunity and the implementation of stringent penalties for offenders. Promote and Efforts to combat marital rape must be accompanied by widespread awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. By challenging societal attitudes and dispelling myths surrounding consent and sexual autonomy, we empower individuals to recognize and resist instances of abuse within intimate relationships. Access to comprehensive support services, including counselling, legal aid, and safe shelters, is essential for survivors of marital rape. Governments and civil society organizations must work collaboratively to establish and bolster these vital resources, ensuring that survivors receive the assistance and protection they deserve. Addressing the global scourge of marital rape requires coordinated action on an international scale. And By fostering collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies, we can leverage collective expertise and resources to effect meaningful change.

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## **Dams and Depletion of Fish Wealth: Some Preliminary Observations from Malabar, Kerala, India**

**Ramdas P.**

### **Abstract**

*Modern dams are state-sponsored mega projects that encapsulate both the Power of the State and its developmental imaginations and capable of making lasting impressions on the ecology. The present study asks the question how the dams on the Western Ghats impact the far-away coastal environment, especially on the fish-resource replenishment or its depletion. While demonstrating this, it also tries to locate the metabolic rift happening in the littoral.*

[Key words: West Coast, Malabar, Fisheries, Depletion, Dams, Ecological Rift]

### **Introduction**

The south-west coast of India is the major contributor to the total fish catch in India. Nearly 30-50 per cent of the total marine fish catch is from this part of India (Krishnakumar 2008). The Indo-Norwegian Project (INP) started in 1953 had made drastic changes in the fish catching technology of Kerala (Kurien 1985). This project had made trawling so popular in Kerala waters. Kerala fishery became an important arena of wealth production. In an attempt to keep the artisanal sector equipped with the pace of the mechanized sector, that is advancing beyond leap and bounds, motorization of the country crafts began in the 1980's (Kerala Fisheries an Overview - 1987 n.d.). By the eighties, there were heated debates in Kerala on the fish resource depletion. Generally, two positions were evolved; one put the blame on over fishing, and the other, took climatic change responsible for this predicament. The present article is an attempt to approach the issue from a different angle. To be more specific, whether the taming of water by big dams had any impact on the sea-water replenishment and marine resource regeneration is the question posed and sought to answer in the present study.

### **The Malabar Littoral**

The sea covers the coast of Kerala is Laccadive Sea popularly known as Arabian Sea. The peculiarity of the geography of Kerala is that the east lying high ranges known as the Western Ghats has a profound role in the life of the State in all sense. The maximum distance between the Ghat ranges and the Arabian sea is just around 110 km. The Arabian sea is nourished by forty-one rivers sprouting from the Western Ghats. The two seasons of rain, the south-west and north-west monsoon, contribute to the land drainage and its discharge through the rivers to the sea. These factors are important in keeping the sea temperature, its salinity, the nutrient salts, and the oxygen-supply etc., in the most favourable level. Thus, the Western Ghats significantly determine the hydrological specialties, the bio-chemical texture and the productivity of the sea. Given this situation, the present study hypothesizes that the dams constructed across the various west-flowing rivers originating from the western ghats have a great role, among many other factors, in the fish-resource depletion of the west-coast in general and Malabar in particular.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the study brings the terrestrial into the discussion of the fish-resource depletion and view the sea as part of the broad watershed region as well. In short, the study visualizes the littoral as extending from the shore area upward up to the high ranges in the east. The study, in parenthesis, problematize the existing notions on the degradation of the environment that view the British rule as the watershed in the environmental history of India. The developmental spree of the post-independence State had also brought the same environmental hazards as it had been by the colonial government.

### **The Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea**

Different floral and faunal species can be found within the Western Ghats, a bio-diversity hot spot in India. There are different types of forests in the western ghats, such as the tropical rainforest, moist deciduous forest, semi-deciduous forest, and evergreen forest. Diverse fresh-water fish species were considered to be potential feeders in the rivers flowing from the high range. The Chalakkudy River, for instance, is regarded as a reservoir of aquatic life (Velayudhan 2012). Through a number of rivers, the sea was connected with the Western Ghats (Krishnan, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Small creeks and other water bodies like ponds and backwaters are included in the system of these rivers. The ocean is another extension of this system, whose regeneration or sustenance is related to the existence of the rest. During the south-west monsoon, we witness a torrent of water from

the high ranges through these rivers, leaving silt and other organic contents into the sea. These rivers are short and with the exception of the Ponnani River all open to the ocean without the barrier of mud deposited in the river-mouth. Through these rivers a relationship is established between the sea and the land mass lying in proximity to it. The characteristics of the water cycles, temperature, salinity, flora and fauna, and the influence of the sea over the land surrounding it are determined by this mutual relation (Ummerkutty 1977). The aquatic ecosystem in Kerala is closely linked to that of the Western Ghats. One of the most significant features of the west-coast is the Mud Banks, as discussed by Rao and Mathew et.al (Rao 1980) They listed the various types of mud banks and explained how they are being formed and how the fishermen are benefiting from them during the turbulent months of the south-west monsoon.<sup>3</sup> The present study argues that the water thus pushed into the sea from the high ranges contains silt, nutrient salts, organic and inorganic contents that contribute to the replenishment of the sea water.

### **The food web**

In the study of fish productivity of the Malabar Coast, the composition and availability of plankton and the nutrients are very significant. Planktons are monocellular organisms. They are abundantly present in temperate and tropical waters. 'Nutrients are essential for the life in the seas and the development of all life depends directly or indirectly on the availability of nutrients. In the marine realm nitrogen, phosphorous, iron and silicate are the most essential for the growth of phytoplankton' and river runoff plays a crucial role in bringing these to the sea (Thomas 2003). Upwelling, a usual phenomenon of the west coast, brings the bottom nutrients up to the water column. 'Arabian sea is the most productive area of the world ocean with the high rate of primary production and the quantum of standing crop by and large comparatively higher than the average values recorded from the other areas of world ocean' (Thomas 2003).

There are several studies on the plankton availability in the rivers originating from the Western Ghats (Nasser 2014) (Abdar 2015) (Waghmare 2015). Many studies have established that the ecological conditions of the Western Ghats discussed above facilitate the production of many micro and single-celled organisms, planktons or diatoms, that constitute the lower layer of ecosystem on the one hand and act as the lower agents in the food-chain in fresh-water and marine water. Here too, we can see the primary producers, consumers, and decomposers. There are two

categories of plankton: phytoplankton and zooplankton. They play an important role in the distribution of energy through the food web transfer. The primary producer is phytoplankton. Sunlight helps the phytoplankton produce sugars, which is why they're known as the primary producers and the base in the marine food web. The zooplankton, being the primary consumer, is the link between primary producer and fish. They will in turn, be eaten by the small fishes and, are known as the secondary consumers. Each level of this consumption is known as the trophic levels. When we proceed from one trophic level to the next, the number of the predators will get decreased thus giving a pyramidal structure to the food chain. The members involved in one food-chain will also be the part of another food-chain thus creating a complex food-web. The individual links in the food-chain and food-web are crucial and the missing of one link will upset the total food-web. It is through this food-web that the transmission of energy from one level to the next takes place.

The recurring blooming of phytoplankton during the south-west monsoon is a significant feature of Malabar coast. The heaviest blooms usually occur in June and July, even though the density may vary from year to year. Blooming occurs at varying intervals in the following months as well, but rarely approaches the monsoon crops in density. The plankton community contains both useful and dangerous members. A dangerous member in the plankton community that feeds on the useful diatoms like *coscinodiscus*, *Nitzschia*, and *Fragilaria*, is called *Noctiluca Miliaris*. The swarming of this variety of plankton in coastal waters is due to the tranquillity of the water. The monsoon rain and the resultant turbulence prevents this organism from doubling in size. The heavy water discharge into the Arabian Sea during the south-west and North-west monsoons could be a check on the proliferation of dangerous plankton in the inshore waters of the west-coast. Naturally, this peculiarity of the West Coast resulting in the large production of fish varieties. The phytoplankton availability on the coast of Calicut was estimated, and it was found that its presence in the Arabian Sea is much greater during the south-west monsoon period (Subrahmanyam R. 1965) Subrahmanyam and Sarma's study is significant because it is one of the early attempts to understand the 'nanoplankton' that eludes the net of the investigators due to its, as the name correctly indicates, smallness in size. These scholars underline the importance of nanoplankton as a feed of the fish larvae, which was not hitherto understood by the scientists (Subrahmanyam R. 1965). The quality of the plankton of the Arabian sea is greatly influenced by the climate and flora of the Western Ghats. The soil formation in the ghats is influenced by the leaves, climbers, flowers, trees, etc.



The soil and floral debris are drained and discharged during the monsoon to the seas. Mud-bank formation in the west-coast of Kerala is caused by this enormous quantity of soil and silt. Scholars say that, 'The characteristics of organic matter deposited in surface sediments of marine environments are being widely used in the correlation of several oceanographic processes such as surface ocean productivity, input of land-derived materials into the ocean, dynamics of water masses, and sedimentation rates' (Jacob 2008). This study found that the surface sediments of the west coast contained a greater quantity of total organic matter than in the Bay of Bengal and hence, the west coast is more productive than the east coast. 'Quality and quantity of organic matter reaching the sediments influence the growth and reproduction of shallow and deep water benthic organisms' (Bhasker 2000). This organic matter comes to the Arabian Sea as a result of the land discharge through the rivers. Had there not been the anthropogenic barriers for the water flow, it could be presumed that, this type of organic matter would have reached the sea even in more quantities.

Sardines and Mackerel were considered to be the staple food of the poor. There is a study that argues that the absence of the sardine shoal is to be connected with the absence or presence of chlorophyll content in the water at the period of phytoplankton bloom (George 2012). The sardine larvae feed on this chlorophyll and grow before being recruited to the sardine shoal. Sardine abundance was reflected in the spatial and temporal variations in the intensity of chlorophyll in coastal waters. He further says that despite steady fishing effort, the increase in sardine landings during the study period indicates a direct trophic link as the reason for the revival of the fishery (George 2012). Another study shows that, 'the Standardized Catch per Unit Effort (SCPUE) along the south-west coast of India from 1985 to 2015 [generally] showed a declining trend in Indian Oil Sardine fishery [especially] during 1985 to 1999 and after that, an increasing trend was observed from 2000 to 2006. The SCPUE of Indian Oil Sardine was highly fluctuating after 2006 and the highest value was observed during 2013. The analysis of the inter-annual variability of Upwelling Index (Offshore Ekman transport), wind speed and Chlorophyll- a concentration [etc.] along the shelf waters of the south west coast of India showed an increasing trend from 2000 to 2006 and it is well explained the increasing trend in Indian Oil Sardine fishery during this period' (George 2018). Here the researcher attesting to the importance of the food producer at the lower level. The decrease in the Oil sardine landings (especially during 1990-1999) were explained by climatic conditions like 'El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)' (George

2018). According to a study on the environment and the mackerel fishery off the coast of Calicut, 'the upwelling usually facilitates plankton bloom and thereby the regeneration of the mackerel fishery here' (Yohannan 1998). This study has also established a positive correlation between the plankton bloom period with high mackerel production and low plankton supply, and a lowered production of this species.

### **Dams in Kerala**

The sovereign nation of India had adopted a multifaceted economic strategy. The policy makers' buzzword was "development." Dams naturally became an important element in the developmental scheme. Following this, a number of dams have been built all over India. Kerala, too, was not an exception. Kerala has a long rainy season that extends from June to October. A good amount of rain water is collected by the Western Ghats of Kerala and channelled through the number of rivers and creeks to the low-lying places. Kerala has 58 dams, including the big, medium and small ones, constructed in various rivers originating from western ghats. Even within a single river, there are more than one dam constructed.<sup>4</sup> The food grain crisis during the II world war led to the construction of these dams (Santhakumar 1995). The authors claim that the dams failed to meet the grain sufficiency requirements and that the geo-climatological features of Kerala are not considered. The river system of Kerala serves the sea for its fish-bearing characteristics and ensures the supply of water to the people in the summer season. Both of the roles mentioned above were affected by the dams in these rivers acting as man-made agencies that arrested the free flow of these rivers. The fish-wealth may also be affected by this broken relation, as numerous studies above pointed out. This 'break' or rift affects the flow of ocean water, the availability of plankton, the content of chlorophyll, and the formation of mud banks. The break in the marine food web is also an important effect of this. Hence, this could rightly be called the 'metabolic rift'.

### **Dams deterring the Metabolic Relation**

The nutrient salt supply, hydrology, and oxygen distribution in the water of the sea may be affected by the fresh-water inflow diversion. The Ghats area has a large number of Dams that hinder the free flow of rivers and it could be assumed that there is a considerable reduction in the discharge of much needed inputs into the sea. The trend may be gradually visible from the lowered catch

rate from the west-coast in general. Dams are not considered to be the absolute determining factor, but it works in combination with many other constituent factors. The high quantity of phytoplankton, the primary producers in the trophic chain, detected from the dam reservoirs of Kerala points to the presence of them in large quantities in the discharge of the down-streaming rivers. Alas, a major portion of that being contained by the dams. The West Coast Sea has an interesting way of reflecting this organic matter deposit into the water. One is the mud-bank formation, locally known as *Chakara*, and the variability of fish landings.

The importance of the metabolic connection existing between the terrestrial and the littoral is emphasized by the above discussion and the two specific instances related with the Sardine and Mackerel fishery. It challenges the long-held notion that over-fishing is the sole cause of the depletion of fish stocks in Kerala waters (Kurien 1990). This take is important because it seriously examines the capitalist relationships which messed up the fishing industry for the worse. It is notable that this approach could positively link the Kerala fishery with the international market, it could very well underscore the inflow of capital to the sector, and it could argue that the fish resource depletion is due to the operation of capital. And, therefore, this argument sounds very logical. The contention here is that socio-economic factors are overemphasized here, and environmental and historical factors are missed. As we already noted elsewhere, the appearance and disappearance of the most common and popular fish, like the sardine and Mackerel, were explained by scholars in relation to the make and break in the trophic link in the coastal waters.

A fundamental idea in Marxian ecology is invoked here. The term is 'Metabolic Rift'. For Marx, human labour is a metabolic process that 'draws on a variety of ecological resources, transforms them into energy, objects, and activities, and cycles them back into the ecology (Lewis, 2014). This is a dialectical process which includes both human labour and ecology and transform, in turn, each other. Marx also recognised a metabolism of natural systems that operated independently of the human society. '[A]s part of his commitment to Ecological materialism, Marx recognized that natural systems, such as the nutrient cycle, had a particular metabolism (an exchange of matter and energy), which operated independently of and in relation to human society, allowing for their regeneration and/or continuance' (Clark 2010). When we come to the ecological relation among the Western Ghats and the sea, we could observe that this metabolism of nature is broken. This break in the natural cycle could be viewed as a metabolic rift leading to a collapse in the regeneration of the sea and thereby the replenishment of fish wealth. If we follow this line of

argument, then we can consider the trophic ‘break’ brought by the Dams on the western ghats as a ‘metabolic rift’.

## Conclusion

The present investigation envisions the ocean as an entity which is constantly influenced and fed by the terrestrial. The geological characteristics of the terrain beneath the Western Ghats shape the swiftly advancing shallow tributaries. A water web that is eventually connected with the Arabian Sea is created by these rivers. This study argues that the water thus pushed into the sea from the high ranges contains silt, nutrient salts, organic and inorganic contents that contribute to the replenishment of the sea water. The fresh-water inflow diversion may affect the nutrient salt (phosphate, nitrate, silicon) supply, the hydrology (temperature and salinity levels), and the oxygen distribution in the water of the sea. These are influential in the productivity of the west-coast. The apparent drawback of the ‘depletion discourse’ in Kerala is that it views the ocean as a separate entity and attempts to link the issue of resource exhaustion with the capitalist endeavour – trawling and related developments – taking place within the ocean. The zooplankton and phytoplankton are microscopic animals that are especially linked with the fish-wealth of the fresh and marine water. Numerous research studies have revealed that the ecological conditions of the Western Ghats discussed above facilitate the lower trophic level to function. The high quantity of phytoplankton detected from the reservoirs of Kerala, points to the presence of them in large quantities in the river runoff. The anthropogenic barriers-Dams- that hinders the water flow could also prevent these organic matters from reaching the sea in more quantities, affecting fish replenishment. This break could well be identified as, in the Marxian sense, a *metabolic rift*.

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<sup>1</sup> The study does not see dams as a curse. It appreciates the various benefits of dams such as electricity generation, as a basic infrastructure for irrigation and canal net-work, and provider of drinking water for the urban centres evolving in the far-off places. At the same time, it sees the dams as one of the inevitable anthropogenic shocks in the high-range environment of Kerala.

<sup>2</sup> In Malabar, the important rivers are, Neeleswaram , Ezhimala-thalassery , Thaliparambu , Valarpattanam , Ancharakkandi , Thalassery , Mahe , Korappuzha, Akalappuzha, ElathurPuzha, Kallayippuzha, Beppurpuzha, Kadalundippuzha, Ponnaniappuzha, Chetuwai river,etc

<sup>3</sup> They explain that, in Kerala this phenomenon is usually found between Quilon (Kollam) in the south and Mangalore in the north. The mud-banks can be classified in to four types: (a) Mud banks formed of subterranean mud; (b), Mud banks formed by the aggregation of coastal mud; (c) Mud banks formed by the sediments and organic debris discharged from rivers and estuaries (d) Mud banks formed by the accumulation of mud resulting from dredging operations. Among these types of mud-banks the 3<sup>rd</sup> one, mud banks formed by the sediments and organic debris discharged from rivers and estuaries, is important in this case. A large number of mud banks of Kerala belong to this category. They are, Chellannum-Manassery (Cochin barmouth), Narakkal (Azhikode barmouth), Valappad-Nattika (Chetwai river mouth), Elathur (Korapuzha river mouth), Quilandy (Kuttyadi river mouth), Muzhuppilangad (Dharmadam river mouth), Kottikulam, Ajanur-N-Bella, Adakathubail (Chandragiri river mouth) Uppala (Uppala river mouth), and Ullal (Netravati river mouth). The other major mud banks are Alleppey-Thottappally mud bank and Parappanangadi-Tanur mud bank. The Alleppey-Thottappally mud bank is formed of subterranean mud and the Parappanangadi-Tanur mud bank is formed by the aggregation of coastal mud. Wherever the mud banks occur the sea will be calm there. The calmness of the sea and the organic sediments attract fish to these formations. It provides a high catch for the fishers.

<sup>4</sup> In Bharatapuzha, there are seven Dams (Malamapuzha, Mangalam, Meenkara, Chulliar, Pothundi, Walayar, Kanjirapuzha) In Chalakkudy River there are five dams (Parambikulam, Thunakkadavu, Peruvaaripallam, Sholayar Dam, Peringalkuthu Dam). In Periyar River there are Idukki, Ponmudi, Anayirankal, Kundala, Mattupatti, Chengulam, Neriymangalam, Bhoothathankettu, and Periyar lake dam. Among this, Idukki dam is one of the highest Arch-Dams in Asia. The Neyyar Dam, the Idamalayar Dam, and the Mullapperiyar Dam also are famous for the big reservoirs.

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## Youth Agency in Times of Crisis: A Study of Kashmiri

### Youth's Response to COVID-19

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#### Abstract

*The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored its potential to disrupt economically fragile states, incite widespread unrest, and strain international crisis management mechanisms. Moreover, the compounding effect of conflict exacerbates the challenges posed by COVID-19 by impeding response efforts. Factors such as civilian displacement, diminished trust in leadership, and fragmented political authority further hinder the implementation of effective pandemic response measures. Within this context, this paper investigates the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict dynamics, particularly within the context of Kashmir, with a specific focus on the agency exhibited by Kashmiri youth in responding to the pandemic and mitigating its effects. Through qualitative interviews with 50 participants aged 15–29, the study reveals that the pandemic provided Kashmiri youth with a platform to exhibit their positive potentials and act as agents of constructive change by leveraging state responses to assist in pandemic management and mitigate its adverse impacts. Local youth mobilised to alleviate the suffering of the populace and optimise scarce resources, thereby underscoring their agency amidst the complexities of conflict dynamics. This study illustrates how Kashmiri youth transcended the conventional victim-perpetrator dichotomy, emerging as transformative agents of positive change during the COVID-19 pandemic. It posits that by harnessing this momentum, the state should cultivate a more*



*enabling environment for the empowerment and active involvement of Kashmiri youth, thus fostering multifaceted benefits for societal progress and cohesion.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Kashmir, Kashmiri youth, agency, transformative agents, victim-perpetrator dichotomy.

## **Introduction**

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 triggered immediate concerns regarding its ramifications for economically disadvantaged nations and marginalised populations, sparking investigations into their ability to effectively mitigate and respond. Likewise, there was contemplation on how the pandemic might exacerbate existing societal inequalities, especially in regions already grappling with humanitarian crises or entrenched conflict (Hilhorst & Mena 2021, p. 175). The intersection of COVID-19 and conflict primarily revolves around two pivotal aspects: firstly, the pandemic's influence on the intensity and dynamics of ongoing conflicts, and secondly, the reciprocal impact of conflict dynamics on the spread and management of the pandemic. This study answers the second question in the context of the Kashmir conflict: how the state grappled with the management of the pandemic alongside the conflict and located the youth at this intersection.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic heightened awareness about its potential to disrupt fragile states, provoke widespread unrest, and strain international crisis management mechanisms (International Crisis Group, 2020). Consequently, various stakeholders advocated for ceasefires and intensified conflict mitigation efforts to facilitate pandemic responses. In April 2020, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres issued an 'Appeal for Global Ceasefire', underscoring the pandemic's repercussions for global peace and security alongside ground-level response actions. By June 2020, more than

170 Member States of the United Nations, as well as numerous non-state entities, including armed factions, had lent their support to this appeal (**Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. 178**). However, emerging literature suggests a nuanced relationship between the pandemic and conflict dynamics, albeit challenging to definitively ascertain. Analysis by Polo (**2020, p. 1**) and Bloem and Salemi (**2021, pp. 5-8**), utilising the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, unveiled mixed trends, with certain forms of conflict initially declining, yet overall conflict-related events increasing in most countries experiencing pre-existing violent conflict. Mehrl and Thurner (**2020, p. 286**) observed divergent impacts across regions, noting increased armed conflict in the Middle East amidst lockdown policies, contrasting with reduced violent clashes in Southeast Asia and the Caucasus. Nevertheless, caution is warranted due to potential reporting biases during the pandemic. For instance, Afghanistan has witnessed a surge in violent attacks on civilians since the pandemic, largely attributed to the Taliban's exploitation of the crisis for propaganda purposes (**Polo 2020, p. 1; Jackson 2020, pp. 5-8**). Ide similarly noted varying conflict trajectories across nine countries, with armed conflict initially declining in Afghanistan, Colombia, Thailand, and Yemen, possibly due to armed groups seizing the opportunity to garner support and resolve logistical challenges. Conversely, conflict prevalence increased in India, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, and the Philippines, attributed partly to weakened state institutions and limited international attention (**Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. 179; Ide 2021, p. 1**).

The dynamics of disaster politics in conflict-affected areas mirror those in peaceful contexts, albeit magnified due to their life-and-death implications. The health, economic, and political repercussions of COVID-19 intertwine with existing conflict dynamics, exacerbating tensions and competition over scarce resources and serving as a tool for political gain and territorial control by various actors (**Hilhorst & Mena 2021, p. 180**). Furthermore, conflict compounds the

challenges posed by COVID-19 by impeding response efforts. Therefore, it becomes essential to explore such dynamics in one of the world's protracted conflicts, Kashmir.

Concerning the Kashmir conflict, its origins trace back to 1947, delineating a territorial dispute between two nuclear states, India and Pakistan. The region has witnessed three major and minor wars, along with constant ceasefire violations along the Line of Control, dividing Jammu and Kashmir into Indian and Pakistani-administered territories. Additionally, internal dimensions of the Kashmir conflict encompass diverse political spectrums, particularly within the Kashmir Valley, ranging from demands of autonomy, self-rule, plebiscite, and the right to self-determination to independence (**Bhan 2012, p. 153**). Election rigging sparked the rise in violence in 1987, which resulted in an armed conflict in the valley that has persisted with varying degrees of intensity ever since. Moreover, since 2008, alternative means of political expression, such as mass protests, strikes, and street violence in the form of stone pelting, have gained prominence (**Reshi 2021, p. 7**).

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi imposed a 21-day national lockdown on March 25 to combat the spread of COVID-19, the people of Kashmir perceived it as an extension of the pre-existing restrictions imposed following the revocation of Article 370, which conferred a measure of regional autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union. A participant from Srinagar argued, 'We have been living under such lockdown since 2019. It seems no different'. However, despite the isolation, Kashmir was not shielded from the spread of the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the intricate interplay between conflict, public health, and socio-economic dynamics, with Kashmir serving as a poignant example. The administration grappled with a growing number of infections, particularly when community transmission ensued. The region's medical infrastructure faced significant challenges, with

limited ventilators, ICU beds, and medical supplies exacerbating the crisis. The pandemic has further exacerbated existing challenges, underscoring the urgency of holistic and inclusive responses to address the multifaceted crises faced by conflict-affected regions. In response, the local youth mobilised to ameliorate people's suffering and leverage scarce resources, highlighting their agency amidst the conflict's dynamics. This paper aims to investigate the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict dynamics, particularly in the context of Kashmir, with a specific focus on the agency exhibited by Kashmiri youth in responding to the pandemic and mitigating its effects.

### **Methodology**

To examine the perceptions and experiences of Kashmiri youth, a qualitative approach was employed. Bryman (2008, p. 442) argues that qualitative research aims to comprehend the social world of participants by emphasizing detailed descriptions. This approach facilitates a thorough explanation of the subject matter. Data was gathered via semi-structured, in-depth interview guides and focus group discussions (henceforth, FGDs) with informed consent from participants. The sample comprised 50 Kashmiri youth aged 15 to 29 from various regions. Given the qualitative nature of the study, data processing involved editing, coding, and open coding, all conducted manually. Data analysis established relationships between variables, while interpretation derived inferences from the collected data.

The theoretical framework of the study is underpinned by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security (UNSCR 2250). It challenges negative preconceptions about youth globally and represents a fundamental shift in the discourse on the relationship between youth, peace, and violence. Furthermore, it recognizes youth as agents of positive change and

forbids viewing them solely as perpetrators or victims in conflict situations (Nations, 2015). This resolution is particularly relevant in conflict-affected regions such as Jammu and Kashmir. Accordingly, the paper discusses and analyzes the dynamics of youth and conflict in Kashmir, highlighting their positive contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic in light of UNSCR 2250.

### **Kashmir conflict and youth**

The 2011 census of the government of India reveals that youth (15–29 age groups) constitute approximately 27% of the whole J&K State population (Reshi 2021, p. 7). Ashok Bhan says, “In a protracted conflict like Kashmir, one must additionally factor in the existence of a new class, i.e., the victims of the conflict. The wounds of those alienated citizens are not easy to heal; no matter what caused them, this new class mostly constitutes the youth” (Bhan 2013, p. 144). The youth in Kashmir has been the primary cohort affected by the ongoing conflict, functioning both as perpetrators and victims. This dynamic has been evident from the insurgency of the 1990s through the post-Amarnath Land Row street violence, with youth consistently at the forefront (Reshi 2021, p. 7). A participant from south Kashmir emphasized this, stating, "Youth have been at the forefront of every kind of violence since 1989 and have become the face of it." Consequently, youth are often confined to the binary roles of perpetrators and victims. Despite their potential to contribute positively to society and act as agents of change, this potential remains underutilized. Participants in the study expressed aspirations for transformative societal change, social and transitional justice, positive peace, communal harmony, the abolition of structural violence, and community development. However, they lament the lack of meaningful opportunities to pursue these goals within the context of the protracted conflict. The study identified several factors that limit their ability to effect positive

change, including a centralized approach to policy formulation by the state, the influence of non-state actors on political and security dynamics, limited opportunities for youth empowerment, and a lack of safe spaces for constructive engagement. These factors collectively inhibit youth from assuming roles as peacebuilders. Particularly, the complex interplay of state and non-state actors, coupled with the resultant shrinking of safe spaces, emerges as a prominent impediment.

The scarcity of safe spaces for youth to engage in socioeconomic and political activities without fear or uncertainty was underscored by participants from south Kashmir. One participant noted, "Political actions from the state or militant entities have mitigated the space for any constructive action on the part of youth. Whatever we do, it makes us suspicious in their eyes. Either we are blamed as Indian agents or sympathizers of Pakistan, hence rendering us vulnerable."

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an opportunity for youth to leverage their potential more effectively. Their proactive engagement in response efforts, facilitated by collaborative endeavors between governmental and civil society actors, created a space wherein political goals were temporarily sidelined, allowing social agents to ameliorate people's suffering. Participants in a focus group discussion in central Kashmir observed, "Both the state and non-state actors compete for influence and local support in Kashmir. However, when the COVID-19 emergency arose, neither could afford to politicize the prevention and relief efforts". Consequently, this unique situation allowed for a temporary reprieve from the usual political contestation, facilitating an environment where social agents could effectively address the crisis without the usual constraints of suspicion and politicization. The pandemic, thus, provided an opportunity for the youth to leverage their potential as agents of positive change. The subsequent section explores how the pandemic has catalyzed Kashmiri youth to emerge as agents of positive change.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic and New Opening for Kashmiri Youth**

Since COVID-19 was declared, first as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, and then as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, it has spread globally at an exponential rate, with 6545561 verified fatalities and 621797133 cases as of October 2022 (**WHO 2022**). By itself, COVID-19 is non-discriminatory and affects everyone, with some demographic groups being relatively more vulnerable to it. Because COVID-19 fundamentally alters people's daily lives and forces them to adapt to shifting conditions, it can be seen as a biographical event in their lives, in addition to being biological in origin. Different groups have been impacted differently depending on their location, the quality of the information they have about the disease, their ability to put that information to use, media accessibility, their education, their cultural background, and the accessibility of healthcare programmes and actions. It is significant to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has had uneven effects on health and economic outcomes depending on age group as well. Young people have a lower chance than older age cohorts of experiencing severe physical health symptoms related to COVID-19 (**Jahangir 2022, p. 1**). Therefore, it gave them some extra cushion to shoulder the responsibilities at their level to tackle this health emergency when other demographic sections became its victims.

In light of this, it is important to underline that the COVID-19 outbreak in Kashmir is also embedded in a political crisis that has become a political-medical catastrophe. On August 5, 2019, India unilaterally repealed Article 370 and separated Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. This important political transformation was achieved by the state by imposing a curfew and an absolute lockdown, which lasted until the epidemic forced another lockdown. Kashmir largely faced the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown due to political and economic closure. Since Article 370

was modified, the lengthy lockdown had kept inhabitants home and away from work for about a year by July 2020, resulting in massive economic losses (Sharma 2021, p. 143).

It is crucial to highlight, however, that throughout these troubling times, a significant section of youth came forward to meet the economic, educational, and health needs of their society's marginalised parts on a grassroots level. Therefore, in the spheres where the state became invisible, youth used their agency to fill the gap. However, such an act was voluntary on the part of youth with no credible support from the state, which sometimes views them with suspicion. Many participants working as volunteers in many rehabilitations and solidarity activities revealed the threats emanating from the state by arguing that if any person engages in much solidarity work, especially for the victims of conflict, they come under the surveillance of the state. This again points out the absence of a safe space in Kashmir.

However, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the state experienced pressure on its health infrastructure, and it became impossible to tackle this health catastrophe without the support of the common masses. It is critical to recognise that the government alone would not have been able to address the epidemic holistically—by planning, implementing, and ensuring that policies reach individuals in need at the last mile. So, because of their enormous reach and massive volunteer base, civil society, non-government, and community organisations are needed to spearhead the government's projects in order to expand its reach and resources. Consequently, the state requested that the local youth, NGOS, and imams of the masjid leverage the resources of the state. Consequently, it opened a safe door for the youth to showcase their potential to become agents of change. They did so effectively and played an important role in tackling the adversaries of the pandemic at the local, community, and district levels.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kashmir frequently encountered misinformation, a shortage of medical resources, and a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups. In each of the three challenges, the youth took the initiative and demonstrated their potential as agents of positive change. Due to the protracted conflict, there is a climate of mistrust and suspicion between the people and the government. Consequently, every law, rule, and policy is being questioned. People initially felt that COVID-19 and the subsequent commotion were a government ploy to prolong the lockdown that followed the revocation of Article 370. As a result, daily violations of COVID rules became the norm among the populace. The state's initial concern was convincing the public that COVID-19 is a global reality and that the subsequent lockdown was not a result of politics but rather a medical catastrophe. Youth, especially educated youth, saved the state because it had trouble persuading the populace. They were given a safe zone where they could support the government and transcend victim-perpetrator dichotomies. They utilised this safe space effectively by exploiting social media to educate the public about the realities of COVID-19 and advocate adoption of the standard COVID SOPs. To determine the truth about COVID-19, the young journalists and other local YouTubers independently visited hospitals and spoke with Kashmiri physicians. It did wonders to dispel the erroneous information surrounding it and garner the necessary public support for the state to implement the safety measures.

In addition to physical separation and lockdown during the COVID-19 epidemic, timely access to information and public awareness of preventative strategies can be the difference between life and death (**Jahangir, 2022, p. 8**). The youth once again played a significant role in the rural poor, where there was little to no knowledge of COVID-19 and related symptoms. This was primarily because of their illiteracy and lack of exposure to the mass media, which in modern times rapidly disseminates health information among the masses. They

carried out the functions of "youth clubs" while disseminating all pertinent COVID-19-related material. According to a participant from north Kashmir, 'the COVID-19-related programmes were conducted to educate the village's young, who then informed their individual families'. When the state's resources were already under a lot of strain, it assisted in getting its message across to the populace.

The second challenge was relieving medical service strain. The state has 47812 cases and 4850 deaths. The first wave from April to July 2020 saw 5000 infections per day. The second wave was worse, with over 6,000 cases in January and February 2022 (**Jahangir 2022, p. 2**). Consequently, the region's health infrastructure, like that of other parts of the country, was overstretched; as a result, only the most seriously ill individuals were allowed to enter hospitals, while moderately and less seriously ill patients were told to remain at home in isolation. Social media was flooded with "save our ship" (SOS) requests for oxygen cylinders, plasma, platelets, transport to hospitals, oximeters, and other life-saving medical supplies as a result of the overabundance of COVID patients. Once more, youth took the lead in aiding the government in handling these challenges. To respond to these SOSs, they worked with many NGOs, including "ATHROUT," and made it possible for all essentials to be delivered to homes. It was very useful for patients who received home care because there were no beds available in hospitals. The youth also created various SOS groups on social media for the purpose of responding to any emergency situations at the village and district levels. The youth had such passion that they went to various NGO offices and volunteered themselves.

Furthermore, as COVID 19 created disruptions in education, educated youth established community schools to compensate for educational losses caused by the lockdown. They educated all segments of society, regardless of colour, creed, religion, or socioeconomic status. A participant from south Kashmir

stated, 'As 'curfews and communication outages have become the new normal in Kashmir, we have adapted to these new standards to limit their harmful consequences'. In addition to schooling, Kashmiri youth have used their own agency at the community level to satisfy the economic and health needs of disadvantaged groups. The state was once again having trouble reaching out to the marginalised groups of society in order to mitigate the negative effects on them. Even though the government gave all excluded groups free food, the financial loss from the lockdown made it insufficient. They gathered public gifts of money, food, clothing, and medicine and distributed them to individuals in need. Youth led each of these activities, showcasing their positive traits and honing their crisis leadership abilities. It is pertinent to mention that during the communication blockade enacted following the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, youth had formed "youth clubs" at the village level to address the needs of underprivileged parts of society. During the COVID-19 shutdown, such groups were more active in terms of efficiency and resources. This time, more and more youth joined these clubs as a result of donations, enhancing their effectiveness.

In essence, Kashmir youth have emerged as a vital constituency for peace by actively supporting the state throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Their efforts to address grievances that the government could not sufficiently manage have mitigated the potential for public resentment against the state. A participant, who leads a youth-led organization in central Kashmir, articulated the intricate relationship between violence and unresolved grievances, stating that 'persistent non-fulfillment of grievances alienates the populace and fosters violence in Kashmir. When grievances accumulate, violent actors exploit them, prompting individuals to resort to violent tactics to achieve redress'. Consequently, youth have played a pivotal role in preempting violence by compensating for governmental shortcomings. To sustain this positive impact, the state must

capitalize on the current momentum by integrating youth into various state spheres and granting them equitable opportunities. By doing so, the youth can fully realize their transformative potential and function as agents of change.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that, under conducive circumstances and within safe spaces, Kashmiri youth have demonstrated significant potential to collaborate across various conflict phases and geographical settings. Their contributions are crucial in fostering lasting peace, stability, and effective governance in the region. Prioritizing the resilience and transformative capabilities of youth promises substantial peace dividends within their communities. The COVID-19 pandemic exemplified this potential, as Kashmiri youth moved beyond traditional roles of victimhood and perpetration to become agents of transformation. To harness this potential, robust support structures, methodological frameworks, quality assurance measures, and strategic investments are essential. Engaging youth in these efforts not only enhances their capacities, skills, and confidence but also cultivates new leaders and strengthens community ties. The state must dismantle entrenched prejudices and preconceptions about Kashmiri youth, shifting the narrative from one of victimhood or perpetration to one of potential and agency. Recognizing and fostering their capacity for positive change is crucial for them to advocate for peace and justice. Ultimately, creating an enabling environment for the empowerment and involvement of Kashmiri youth can yield multifaceted benefits for societal progress and cohesion. Embracing their contributions can help build a more harmonious and equitable future for all stakeholders involved.

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## **Changing Nature of communication through Political Advertisement on social media: A study based on the Lok Sabha Election Campaign, 2019**

**Durba Manigram**

### **Abstract**

*The emergence of social media has transformed political communication on a global scale, with India being no exception. The utilization of social media platforms has brought about a significant shift in political advertising within the Indian context, a change that has become particularly prominent after the 2014 Indian General Elections. The present study explores the methodologies employed by the leading political parties in India for the purpose of advertising and promotion as well as for crafting and disseminating their narratives during the period spanning 2014 – 2024 Indian General Elections. This research article highlights the strategic evolution of digital campaigns with a particular emphasis on personalization, micro-targeting, influencer collaborations, and real-time engagement to influence public sentiment.*

### **Introduction**

The proliferation of social media has transformed the landscape of political communication worldwide, altering the dynamics of how political parties engage with voters. A crucial aspect of political communication is the realm of political advertising, which involves utilizing paid media to disseminate political messages to a specific target audience. Political parties have traditionally placed considerable reliance on political advertising as a pivotal mechanism for propagating their agendas and influencing public sentiment. Politicians and political parties have been using the internet for more than decades now to try and better connect with voters in this age of new media society. Political advertisements defined as “interactive content placed for a fee” (Fowler et al., 2020, p.112) on social media are characterized by their ability to reach a vast audience with tailored messages, leveraging data analytics to micro-target specific voter demographics. Thus, through many years, political advertising has served as an important tool carrying a vital component in endorsing policies and candidates and promoting party manifestations during elections. Traditionally newspapers, direct mail, radio and televisions were the main vehicles of political advertisements (Nott, 2020) but at present digital media has



become an important vehicle of political advertisements where Meta and Google Ads play a crucial role.

In a country like India, with its diverse and rapidly growing internet users, social media platforms have evolved into indispensable instruments for political parties in shaping interactions between politicians and electorates. This approach allows for more personalized and direct communication strategies, potentially enhancing voter engagement and participation. The landscape of political communication has undergone notable transformations with the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as the use of these platforms allows for targeted messaging, user engagement and information dissemination during election campaigns. President Barack Obama was the first person to utilize social media for the promotion of political communication during his presidential election in the US in 2008. The 2014 General Elections in India marked a significant turning point, underscoring a new era in political campaigning due to the prominent role of social media (Jodha 2022). During the 2014 Indian General Election social media was first used as a vehicle to promote political advertisements to the audiences in India. The ubiquity of such platforms has transformed political advertisement from traditional forms to dynamic, interactive, and highly targeted campaigns.

The impact of political advertising that is posted on social media platforms during an election campaign is enhanced by symbols, slogans, colours, sounds, texts, and other visual components (Dolanbay 2019, 225). Such text may result from search engine queries, photographs may surface on websites or social media, and videos may pre-roll certain content or eventually show up in a stream after a while (Fowler et al., 2022). Through this type of political advertising campaigns over social media, candidates and political parties are allowed to interact personally with their prospective voters and shape the political conversation (Biswas 2014, p. 128) They are successful in raising the degree and the depth of citizen engagement they receive (Baldwin, 2016, p.533). Shares, likes, and comments are triggered by advertising content (Peeters et al., 2023).

This article investigates the increasing usage of social media platforms by political organisations from 2014 onwards during the Indian general elections and the transformation of the narrative of political parties through digital advertisements over the years. Furthermore,

this study focuses on the consequences of political advertising on social media, concentrating on how these advertisements influence engagement and the broader democratic process in India. As the world's largest democracy, India's electoral procedures and outcomes are not only of national significance but also garner global attention. The 2024 Lok Sabha election presents a distinctive opportunity to scrutinize this phenomenon in one of the most extensive democracies globally. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become crucial battlegrounds for political parties seeking to influence and mobilize voters. This analysis strives to evaluate the narrative, communication and strategies utilized in social media political advertisements, their efficiency in voter engagement, and the broader implications for democratic processes in India.

### **Social media and Indian politics**

The substantial increase in political advertisements on social media can be attributed to the demographic of young people, who devote a significant amount of their time to these platforms. It is widely acknowledged by various stakeholders, including political parties, that the youth population holds considerable influence, prompting concerted efforts to sway this segment. The Election Commission of India's declaration for the 2024 general election revealed a voter base of 968.8 million individuals, with 18.5 million falling within the 18-19 age bracket - marking a 23.3% surge from 2019. Moreover, a notable portion of the electorate, amounting to 197.4 million individuals aged 20-29, possesses the capacity to notably impact electoral outcomes.

The advent of social media has sparked a transformative discourse in the realm of politics. This medium has empowered ordinary citizens to articulate their political viewpoints in an unprecedented manner. While this development is largely positive, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent challenges stemming from the vast volume of information generated and disseminated. This influx has paved the way for the proliferation of misinformation, political polarization, and animosity towards certain groups, fueled by the dissemination of fake news and propaganda. The absence of robust mechanisms to verify the authenticity of information exacerbates these issues, underscoring the urgent need for effective regulation.

A pivotal factor driving the aforementioned trends is the youthful populace of India, which boasts a significant demographic dividend. With a population of 1.3 billion individuals and an average age of 29, India stands as one of the youngest nations globally. Notably, half of the population falls below the age of 25, while 65% is under the age of 35. Concurrently, statistics from Nepolencat indicate that as of February 2024, 39.1% of India's population are active users of Facebook, predominantly comprising males. The age groups of 18-24 and 25-34 emerge as the most prominent user segments, encompassing first-time voters, college students, and young professionals who rely heavily on online platforms for information consumption.

The pervasive use of smartphones among these demographics has led to a shift in media consumption patterns, distancing individuals from traditional sources such as television and radio. This digital transition is underscored by the interactive nature of social media, which enables direct engagement between political figures and the electorate. Political parties leverage this platform to swiftly respond to public sentiment, address grievances, and tailor their strategies accordingly. The virality of content on social media further amplifies campaign messages, enabling them to reach a wider audience through shares and retweets. Consequently, political parties in India favor social media as a primary tool for electoral campaigns due to its extensive reach, cost efficiency, and real-time engagement capabilities.

#### The 2014 Indian General Election: A Digital Revolution through social media in Indian Electoral politics

A social media revolution in Indian politics was sparked by the 2014 Indian general elections, which is recognized as the “First Social Media Election” in the country’s political history (Jodha 2022, p 225). A revolution in political advertising occurred during the 2014 Indian General Elections when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi for the first time in India started employing social media-focused political advertising to connect with a wider audience, especially the younger generation.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has compelled other parties to restructure their social media presence due to its success in mobilizing India's digital generation through social media

platforms. Though “Achhe Din aane wale hay (Good days are coming)” was the hindi slogan of BJP for the 2014 Indian General Election but the "Abki Baar Modi Sarkar" campaign gained international recognition by using viral videos, targeted advertisements, and thought-provoking articles to build a wave of support. The BJP's digital approach was centered on portraying Modi as a leader who is focused on development, in sharp contrast to the Congress party, which was the incumbent and mired in scandals related to corruption. Twitter was his one of the most crucial tool for communication. The central theme of their campaign revolved around highlighting the alleged mismanagement and corruption scandals attributed to the Indian National Congress (INC) – National Congress Party (NCP) coalition administration. Covering a vast expanse of 288 constituencies, BJP strategically proliferated its narrative by maintaining its strong presence on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Through the use of targeted advertising, content engagement and personal branding BJP was able to reach voters who fit specified demographics, especially young and urban ones. The Election Commission reports that the BJP alone spent INR 714.28 crores (\$115 million) on the 2014 elections. This is around INR 200 crores (\$32 million) in excess of what the Congress spent on elections in 2014. Ultimately, this concerted effort culminated in securing a significant portion of the voting populace, approximately 66 percent equivalent to 551.3 million voters, consequently bringing about the downfall of the INC-NCP government that had held power in India for over five decades. Eventually, The Financial Times referred to Narendra Modi as "India's first social media prime minister" due to his increased popularity through the use of social media in the 2014 Indian General Election (Sen 2019). It is noteworthy to highlight that during 2014 general election BJP reportedly controlled around 18,000 fake Twitter identities and between 200,000 and 300,000 WhatsApp groups (Jenny, 2024). But with its victory in 2014, the BJP established a precedent for future elections by showcasing social media's ability to rally support from voters and influence election results.

### **Indian General Election, 2019: Intensifying Digital Engagement**

Compared to 2014, election campaign in 2019 made far more use of digital media. A further development in the 2019 election was the formation of separate social media teams by politicians. This trend has continued into 2019 as more national, state, and local parties, as well

as individual candidates, are using these services. Despite their past opposition to computerization, even Communist parties have started training their cadres. Though compared to 2014, Congress' social media spending increased tenfold in 2019 (Jodha 2022, p 225), still as compared to the other political parties, the BJP's social media campaigns was the most well-organized and innovative. An information flow structure and center vision are established through several communication levels. Opinion leaders at all levels used to forward communications from Delhi and used to retweet posts. Using a multi-step distribution plan that included official networks, state units, intermediate layer intermediaries, well-wishers and local influencers, the party mostly relied on WhatsApp; which is why the 2019 Indian General Election was also termed as the "first WhatsApp election in India". Each ministry and politician established its own social media team, complete with a social media coordinator to take and post pictures from events and rallies. In 2019 a growing amount of political advertising is being disseminated through private networks like Telegram, Signal, WhatsApp, and Messenger (both owned by Facebook). With the "Main Bhi Chowkidar (I too am a watchman)" campaign, the BJP maintained its hegemony. The initiative aimed to engage citizens directly by urging them to prefix their names on social media sites with "Chowkidar." The goal of this campaign was to strengthen Modi's reputation as a watchful defender against corruption. In 2014 BJP mainly focused on highlighting its leader but in 2019 it tried to control content that citizen consumes. By highlighting the incident of the surgical strike of 2016, safely return of captive Indian Air Force Pilot Abhinandan Varthaman and air-strike of 2019 against Pakistan, the party strained to promote patriotism and nationalism among its countrymen through the use of not only offline media but also online social media platforms. "Modi hay to mumkin hay" narrative was designed all over the social media platforms, to reinforce Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image as a strong, fearless vigilant guardian of the nation to protect the interests of the common man, through this narration the party endorsed the performance, integrity, decisiveness and leadership quality of Prime Minister Modi to build a stronger nation.

In contrast, the Indian National Congress (INC) increased its social media presence by promoting campaigns like "Ab Hoga Nyay," which highlighted issues like economic and justice reforms, agrarian distress and unemployment. Data analytics was used far more frequently in the 2019 elections to target messages at particular demographic groups. Data

analytics, Real-time engagement and influencer partnership were among the major developments of social media which were utilized extensively to promote political advertising on social media during the 2019 Indian General Election. Twitter hosted its own "Tweeter Election" in anticipation of the 2019 general election. 56 million tweets on elections were sent out before the main election ended. On the days when the general elections were held in 2019, between 5.4 and 8.2 lakh tweets were sent (Yadav 2023, p 1084). According to Facebook and Google Ads Lab Archives 2019, the top three spenders on Facebook ad were Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian National Congress and All India Trinamool Congress. On the other side the top five spenders on Google ads were Bharatiya Janta Party, Telugu Desam Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Indian National Congress and Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party. BJP being the top spender on social media-led political advertising has spent INR 4.3 crore on Facebook ads and INR 18 crore on Google ads. Indian National Congress paid INR 1.8 crore on Facebook ads and INR 2.71 crore on Google ads, whereas All India Trinamool Congress spent INR 29.28 lacs on Facebook ads and Telugu Desam Party spent INR 5.8 crore on Google ads, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam spent INR 4.1 crore on Google ads and Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party spent INR 2.31 crore on Google ads.

Because of the extensive use of social media for promoting political advertisement another major development that occurred during the 2019 general election was the development of a "Voluntary Code of Ethics" by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) in collaboration with the Election Commission. The Code was created to protect the integrity of the election process and to guarantee the free, equitable, and moral usage of social media platforms. The Commission had received assurances from the social media platforms that they would make it easier to obtain information about electoral matters and willingly launch efforts to raise public understanding of election-related laws and guidelines. For the election, there was a high-priority dedicated reporting channel to facilitate communication and feedback exchange for prompt response. In order to alert ECI of violations of Section 126 of the R.P. Act, 1951 and other relevant election rules, platforms have devised a notification mechanism. The platforms promise to act on reported violations of Section 126 within three hours, and they will move quickly to handle other complaints as well.

### **The 2024 Indian General Election: Emerging Trends and Narratives**

The 2024 Indian General Election has further entrenched the role of social media in political campaigning. The Google Ad Transparency Center reveals that during the 2024 Indian general election, spanning from March 1 to May 26, the primary spenders on Google ads were the Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian National Congress, and Yuva Jansam Rythi Congress Party. The BJP, leading the expenditure, allocated INR 80.8 crore, while the Indian National Congress and Yuva Jansam Rythi Congress Party spent INR 43.8 crore and INR 18.5 crore respectively on Google advertising. Analysis of the ad formats indicates that 81.1% (INR 1.74B) of the total ads comprised video content, 18.8% (INR 402M) featured images, and a mere 0.0985% (INR 2.11M) contained solely text. The Facebook Ad Library Report covering the period from 24th February to 23rd May, 2024, showcases the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the leading spender on Facebook pages, followed by the Indian National Congress and Aam Aadmi Party. BJP's expenditure on Facebook pages amounted to INR 188,966,088, in the Facebook library. Additionally, the Indian National Congress invested INR 10,887,320 in Facebook advertising, while Aam Aadmi Party disbursed INR 66,940,365 for their Facebook advertisements. Interestingly, the Facebook page "Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar" also made a notable investment of INR 17,241,021 in Facebook advertising during this specific timeframe.

By adhering to this dataset, a straightforward analysis can be conducted comparing the expenditure on political advertising on social media during the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections. The escalation in spending on digital political campaigns across successive years can be readily comprehended. This phenomenon underscores the significance and influence wielded by political advertisements on various social media channels.

Political parties are once again directing their attention towards engaging young voters, who played a crucial role in the electoral triumphs of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 and 2019. The campaigns and manifestos are now increasingly customized to cater to the concerns and aspirations of this dynamic demographic, underscoring the evolving landscape of Indian democracy. Even in 2024, the Bharatiya Janata Party remains the leading spender on digital advertisements.

In the run-up to the 2024 Indian General Election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) initiated the ambitious "Abki Baar 400 Paar" campaign, with the objective of securing a resounding victory by clinching over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha. Concurrently, the predominant narrative of the extensive advertising campaign on social media revolves around promoting the slogan "Phir Ekbaar Modi Sarkar". The content of all advertisements primarily revolves around accentuating the accomplishments of the Modi administration, with a focus on sustained progress, economic advancement, national security, and India's expanding global influence. By utilizing sophisticated data analytics for micro-targeting, the BJP tailored its social media promotions to specific voter categories, including young voters, women, first-time voters, and diverse regional demographics, offering personalized content in regional languages. Despite the prevalence of ads in Hindi, the acknowledgment of India's linguistic diversity led political parties to produce content in various regional languages to ensure widespread accessibility and resonance. The utilization of live streaming for rallies, town halls, and public speeches by Narendra Modi and other key figures was extensive, fostering a direct and personalized connection with the electorate. Hashtags like #AbkiBaar400Paar, #Modi2024, and #NewIndia were actively promoted to generate a buzz on social media platforms, often trending on Twitter and amplifying the campaign's visibility. Supporters were urged to utilize these hashtags and contribute their own content, cultivating a sense of community and active participation in the campaign. Furthermore, the BJP engaged with voters through interactive posts, polls, and Q&A sessions on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, facilitating real-time feedback and fostering a sense of involvement among voters. The party maintained a vigilant and responsive presence on social media, promptly addressing voter queries and rebutting opposition narratives.

In contrast, the Indian National Congress (INC) launched a vigorous and dynamic social media advertising campaign under the central theme of "Bharat Jodo" (United India) to rejuvenate its outreach and connect with a diverse electorate. The theme underscores national unity, social cohesion, and inclusivity. The campaign strategically leveraged impactful and trending hashtags like #BharatJodo, #CongressForChange, and #NyayKiNayiBaat to boost visibility and engagement across various platforms. The slogans and content of the advertisements,



featuring messages like “Haath Badlega Halat”, emphasized economic justice, unity, and social welfare, aiming to resonate with a broad audience disenchanted with the current governance.

### **Control of the narratives on social media**

Whoever wields authority over social media platforms will ultimately affect the discourse, consequently yielding significant influence over public perception and the interpretation of a given subject. These platforms have fundamentally transformed the reception of information, the expression of opinions, and participation in public dialogues. Through digital advertisements on social media, political parties mould the narrative, viewpoint, or discussion related to a specific topic of interest. If executed effectively, this control empowers parties to manipulate public sentiment. Social media platforms provide a medium for political parties to generate and circulate various forms of content, encompassing text, images, videos, and hyperlinks. Parties that possess a certain level of control over the narrative, characterized by strategic positioning, timely delivery, and visually appealing content, can create and disseminate information that furthers their objectives. Social media platforms utilize intricate algorithms to curate users' feeds and suggest content. Political parties can leverage these algorithms to elevate particular narratives while subduing opposing perspectives. This approach is contingent upon the financial resources allocated by each political party on individual social media platforms. Those steering the narrative often maintain extensive networks of followers, influencers, and advocates who contribute to amplifying their messages. This network effect significantly extends the reach and influence of their narrative. Social media enterprises employ gatekeeping mechanisms to oversee content through regulation and censorship. The incumbent government may employ this strategy to stifle dissenting voices or endorse specific narratives. Nevertheless, Twitter (renamed as X) has terminated this practice, granting users greater liberty to articulate their viewpoints. Content that evokes intense emotions like rage, fear, or exhilaration is more likely to become viral. Those managing the narrative may intentionally devise content to incite emotional reactions and disseminate their message widely. Presently, content revolving around the three 'Rs' (Race, Religion, and Royalty) is gaining substantial traction in advancing the political parties' intended agendas.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be stated that the elections of 2024 have evolved into a platform where traditional campaign strategies intersect with state-of-the-art technology, reshaping the realm of political discussion. The ascent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the widespread impact of social media platforms and political advertisements, and the extensive scope of the internet, empower political figures to utilize digital resources in order to involve voters, craft narratives, and even influence perspectives. Social media platforms have arisen as potent instruments for political interaction, enabling contenders and factions to directly connect with voters, broadcast their messages, and rally support. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have turned into essential elements of political communication, granting politicians the ability to swiftly reach millions of voters. A remarkable aspect of the 2024 elections is the unparalleled utilization of social media analysis and customized advertising strategies. AI-driven algorithms scrutinize massive amounts of user information to target specific demographics with personalized political messages. The proficiency of political parties in formulating and disseminating their narratives via digital channels to sway voters and impact public perception has significantly risen. The utilization of social media has facilitated a bidirectional communication between politicians and voters, enabling more prompt feedback and discussion. The utilization of augmented reality for immersive campaign experiences, artificial intelligence for predicting voter behavior, and micro-targeting for reaching specific voter segments represent examples of emerging advancements. With parties focusing on themes such as the digital economy, environmental sustainability, and fair growth, the narratives have undergone a transformation.

Personalization and Micro-targeting, influencer partnerships, user-generated content, real-time interaction, and narrative construction stand out as crucial strategies for advocating their concepts through political advertisements on social media platforms. Political parties have leveraged social media platforms to engage with voters in real-time and customize their message for particular audiences, thus enhancing voter participation and shaping public discussions.

Nonetheless, the expansion of AI in political campaigning raises ethical dilemmas concerning data confidentiality, algorithmic partiality, and the manipulation of public sentiment. The utilization of AI-fueled deepfake technology, for instance, poses a considerable risk to the integrity of the electoral process, as candidates might be subjected to fabricated videos or audio recordings intended to mislead voters. Consequently, regulatory structures and ethical standards are imperative to guarantee that AI is employed responsibly and transparently in the electoral context.

The internet has emerged as a fertile environment for misinformation and disinformation, with erroneous narratives and propaganda disseminating rapidly through social media platforms, messaging applications, and online discussion forums. In the period leading up to the elections, political entities have weaponized misinformation to undermine adversaries, manipulate public sentiment, and sow discord among voters. Furthermore, social media platforms have encountered challenges in curtailing the dissemination of misinformation, as algorithms designed to enhance user engagement often prioritize sensational or provocative content over factual accuracy. The swift propagation of misinformation presents a substantial obstacle to electoral integrity, as false narratives can swiftly gain traction and impact public perception.

Thus, it can be understood that advertising on social media by political parties has the potential to be extremely effective and game-changing. There's nothing one can do when they see a political advertisement on TV. It gets lost in the chaos as one watches it and then forgets about it. But with social media, anyone can do more than just watch it—viewers can also like it and share it with their loved ones, friends, and coworkers to help spread the word and can also express their opinion about the content as well the political advertiser of the concerned ad.

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## India's Minimum Wage Evolution: A Review

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### Abstract

*The paper explores the importance of wage levels in determining the well-being of individuals in India. However, it explains how minimum wage in India has evolved over time reflecting changes in economic conditions, labor laws, and social welfare policies. The evolution reflects a continuous effort to protect workers' rights, ensure fair compensation, and address labor exploitation through legislative members and policy reforms. The Code on Wages, 2019 aimed to modernize and streamline India's wage structure, introducing the concept of a floor wage. It emphasizes on the key factors influencing wage levels and living standards in India. Poverty Alleviation, Social Security Benefits, Gender Equality, Labour Market Fairness, Economic Growth and Social Cohesion plays a crucial role in promoting social welfare, economic development in India.*

Key words: Minimum wages, Living wage, ILO, Social security

### Introduction

Wage levels are the cornerstone of community culture and well-being in any modern, industrially evolved civilization. The wage rate determines the living standard for the earner by imparting purchasing power. A family's potential for future growth is measured by the amount of money left over after meeting basic needs. The pay envelope is the only way for the ordinary man to have access to the whole of life and for our culture to remain democratic. The wage system's upper and lower mill-store prices are what the worker earns in exchange for his labor and the prices of the commodities he purchases (Khurana, S et.al. 2023)

In India, laborer exploitation used to be commonplace. The workers have always experienced social and economic hardship, whether it was during the Mughal era or British administration. The state works to eradicate poverty in order to better the lot of laborers in the nation. By establishing a minimum wage, the government hopes to accomplish two goals: the social one of ensuring that laborers receive a fair compensation for their

labor while also achieving the economic goal of encouraging people to use their full potential in order to reap the greatest rewards (Narayana, S; Mukherjee, S.P, 2022)

Reducing the pay gap at little to no negative cost to employment is a hypothesis that is supported by the current theoretical and empirical studies that have been evaluated. The current conventional knowledge holds that employment effects of minimum wages are generally minimal, unpredictable, and dependent on a wide range of national circumstances. Minimum wages have always entailed trade-offs with employment levels.

It takes careful policy planning to fully realize the promise of minimum wages. The scope of legal coverage is one factor. While minimum wages are almost universal, they frequently have insufficient coverage and leave out people who are most in need of social security, such as those who work from home as domestic helpers or those at the bottom of the subcontracting hierarchy. The minimum wage's setting level is a second factor. A minimum wage is effective which is set at a level that, without imperiling employment, ensures a minimum living wage that provide protection net.

There is insufficient money for workers and their families to live comfortably when minimum wages are set excessively low, as is the case in many nations. Trade-offs in employment, however, are unavoidable when they are set too high. Thirdly, there's compliance. The potential of minimum wages to reduce inequality can be severely undermined by significant non-compliance rates, which occur when labor inspection services are inadequate and public employment guarantee programs are absent, drawing workers from underpaying firms. The main aim of the study is to provide an in-depth examination of Minimum Wage Policy of India and its function as a tool for labor market growth.

### **India's Minimum Wage: A Historical Overview**

The ILO defines the minimum wage (MW) as the wage that forms the basis of the wage structure. Its purpose is to safeguard employees who occupy the lowest position in the salary distribution (ILO, 2008, p. 34). According to International Standards, the Minimum Wage (MW) is defined as the lowest possible monetary value that can be provided to employees in a given location in a given period of time, whether through collective bargaining or existing actions. It is set by law in certain nations, but it is also decided by collective agreements (which are the result of talks between employers and employees) or tripartite dialogue (which involves employers, employees, and the government in a negotiation).

Minimum wages are now considered an important and relevant policy tool that can significantly improve social justice by improving the lives of low-wage workers around the world, after years of relative neglect. In many nations of the world there have been positive developments that have contributed to the change in public opinion. According to the National Minimum Wage implemented in the United Kingdom in 1999, the most effective government policy of the previous 30 years, thus experiencing a significant resurgence as a minimum wage in emerging nations.

Wage floors were implemented in South Africa in 2002 to counteract the racial discrimination that had been instituted during the apartheid era and to sustain the wages of the low-paid employees in the hotel, domestic, and agricultural sectors as well as other industries where unions are weak (Rani, U et.al. 2013). In response to mounting worries over rising income inequality, China introduced new restrictions in 2004. The majority of the time, minimum wages are imposed in an environment where there are a lot of irregular and casual workers that operate outside the purview of labor inspection agencies that are understaffed.

To protect the income level and living conditions of workers who are considered the most vulnerable in the labor market, as well as the circumstances of their families, the minimum wage is usually linked to the level of survival that is considered essential in a given society. As a result, prices are formed with a moral or ethical component (by setting a lower limit than the value of labor), taking into account political standards for determining what constitutes a fair wage and, in certain cases, decent living conditions (Medeiros, 2005).

India's minimum wage has a long history that began before the country gained independence and has changed dramatically over time.

- 1920: K.G.R. Choudhary proposed the notion of a minimum wage and the creation of boards to regulate the minimum pay for various industries.
- 1928: Though it wasn't yet enacted into law in India, the International Labour Conference established a framework to set pay for various trades.
- 1943: An investigation committee studying labor conditions, including wages, was established by the Standing Labour Committee.
- 1948: In 1948, on March 15, the Indian Parliament passed the Minimum Wages Act. One important milestone in the fight against labor exploitation was this act, which fixed minimum wage rates in specific occupations.

- After 1948: The Act has undergone multiple amendments to accommodate evolving economic circumstances and labor market patterns. It stipulates that the power to set wages rests with both the federal and state governments. Although the law is legal and not legally binding, paying employees less than the minimum wage is considered forced labor.
- Recent undertakings: The Code on Wages, 2019 attempted to streamline and update the nation's wage structure, introducing the idea of a floor wage.

Because of inequality in the disbursements and the ability of various companies to pay, minimum wage rates varies between states, industries, skill sets, geographic areas, and job categories. According to the most recent data, Andaman & Nicobar received the highest minimum wage rate at Rs. 322/day, while Tripura, the lowest at Rs. 38/day. This law has been essential in guaranteeing laborers a minimal standard of life and avoiding labor exploitation in India.

John (1997) asserts that both internal and external forces added to the passage of the Minimum Wage Law in 1948. Internal causes included rising industrial discontent and workers' strikes against their "starvation wages", as well as the undercount of factories and workers during the first half of the twentieth century. Convention No. 26 adopted by the International Labor Organization According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) on fixing minimum wages in occupations, there is no competent collective bargaining or if wages are unusually low in 1928 as one of the external criteria. India's system is still among the most complex in the world, even though it was among the first developing nations to implement minimum wages. The Minimum Wages Act 1948 sets out the minimum wage rates to be paid to workers in a number of specified industries, or "scheduled employees", by the "appropriate government". This means that all companies established by the Central Government, which are supposed to be working under the Railways, in respect of a mine, oil field, major port or any company, pay the minimum wages fixed by the Government. State governments, on the other hand, set all other rates through the appointment of tripartite advisory boards comprising government, employer, and worker representatives.

The number of "scheduled employments" determines the percentage of workers prone to the minimum wage, put by each state. The Minimum Wage Act of 1948 requires states to protect employees in 13 specific occupations identified as industries not protected by collective bargaining, leaving them vulnerable to unfair and low wages and exploitation (Bureau of Labor, 2005). However, the law also gave state governments the



power to add other sectors to this list, and as a result, one or more Indian states now cover more than 300 distinct industries. While some states, like Orissa and Tamil Nadu, have greatly increased coverage, other states, like Manipur and Mizoram, have mostly maintained it (Labour Bureau, 2005).

Consequently, there are several minimum wage rates in India, and they differ between states and between jobs within a state. The Indian Labor Bureau (2009) reported that while the central government fixes minimum wage levels for 48 different job categories, state governments also fix minimum wage levels for 1,123 separate job categories in “scheduled” industries under the Act. This means that there are 1171 distinct minimum wage rates in India. This is partly due to the vast expanse of the nation. India is no exception when it comes to relying on occupational, sectoral and/or sectoral minimum wages rather than a single national minimum wage. Multiple rate systems that vary by industry and/or occupation are enacted in about half of the countries. Multiple rates prevail in Africa, Asia and, to a lesser extent, Latin America and the Caribbean, while national minimum wage systems prevail in industrialized economies (ILO Working Conditions Laws Database). From multimodal systems to national systems that have a historical trend to increase coverage and simplify minimum wages across countries. This trend can be used to explain some of the differences between multiple and single types. For example, the United Kingdom eliminated its industry-wide trade board structure in the 1980s and instituted a basic national minimum wage in its place in 1999. The way ILO standards have evolved also reflects this trend. Convention no. ILO Convention No. 26, adopted in 1928, supported the application of selective minimum wage provisions to certain categories of workers who lacked bargaining power in the labor market. Convention No. 131 of the ILO of 1970 advocates a more comprehensive approach that covers the largest number of workers. While both methods are effective, global experience shows that relatively simple systems work best and overly complex minimum wage institutions are least effective. Chaos can result from a lack of central coordination, when different rates appear randomly selected and lack overall coherence. However, it can be difficult to explain and implement different rates, especially when employers and employees are unsure which rate, if any, applies to them. Therefore, it is preferable to "design a simple system that is well understood by everyone, rather than trying to fully address the heterogeneous needs of the workforce," according to the findings of one study (Cunningham, 2007, p. 4). Ghose concisely explains that having "a plethora of legal minimum wages, all set arbitrarily, varying between jobs within a state and between states on the same job" in the case of India is "indefensible" (Ghose, 1997, p.697). The Government of India proposes that states fix minimum wages through negotiations within five broad regional committees (for East, North-

East, South, North and West regions) and strengthens the coordination functions of the Central Advisory Board for Labor Coordination. It's important to note that policymakers have debated for years whether the minimum wage should be rationalized and applied to all workers. In 2003, the Central Advisory Committee created a working group that led to the implementation of the National Minimum Wage. The first rate was Rs 665 (GoI, 2007). This was followed by Rs 80 per day in December 2008, Rs 100 per day in December 2009 and Rs 115 per day in April 2011 (equivalent to approximately US\$1.5, US\$2.0 and US\$2.3 respectively).

### **Minimum Wage as an instrument to combat poverty**

MW is a tool for fighting poverty because it protects the incomes and living conditions of the most vulnerable workers and their families. Because MW (which is the minimum wage for paid workers) is clearly insufficient. Therefore, it cannot protect the following groups: those who work outside the capitalist form of employment (such as those who work for their own consumption or are not paid), uninsured MWs, and workers. To help Indian workers escape poverty, minimum wage policies have often been implemented. However, there have been theoretical and empirical doubts about the effectiveness of this program. Examining how the minimum wage affects poverty in India was the goal of a study conducted in this particular setting. This study uses a probit method to estimate the impact of the minimum wage on poverty. By analyzing data on Indian individuals and households. This study considered various poverty lines to account for differences in income distribution. and regional, industry, and employment differences.

### **Minimum Wage as an instrument to face wage inequality**

The MW targets employees who are disproportionately overrepresented in the labor force, protecting the most vulnerable workers there. Because women perform low-paying jobs and are primarily employed as domestic workers, it plays a significant role in promoting financial equality between men and women. The MW has a significant impact on youth since it serves as a benchmark for estimating the pay that someone entering the labor market will get. Further evidence of its influence on the calculation of starting salaries in some categories is provided by the fact that floors for various categories, determined through collective bargaining, are generally equal to the MW value.

### **As an organizer to remuneration scale**

Because it supports the provision of equal wages for comparable tasks related to basic vocations, the MW sets the wage scale in the labor market. The MW guides the establishment of a salary hierarchy based on the structure of a profession, in addition to achieving income equality at the base of the salary scale. Because of the equality (base) and hierarchy (structure) functions, MW is a tool that can be used to narrow or widen the salary distribution. In other words, there is a correlation between low real MW values and higher wage dispersion, while higher MW values are associated with lower wage dispersion. Therefore, an increase in MV tends to improve a nation's income distribution as long as it boosts the wage structure, although income inequality is not limited to differences in labor income and is mainly influenced by the concentration of profits generated in the hands of workers.

### **As an instrument to narrow the gender pay gap**

By establishing a floor on earnings, minimum wage laws might assist minimize income inequality, especially for low-paid workers, who are frequently women. The gender pay gap will shrink if the minimum wage is raised because women in low-paying jobs are more likely to see an increase in their income. Employers must pay all workers, including women, at least the minimum wage when minimum wage laws are properly implemented and enforced. In addition to preventing women from being paid less than males for doing the same work, this aids in combating wage discrimination. The economic security of women in low-paying jobs—who are disproportionately impacted by poverty can be increased by boosting the minimum wage. This can result in greater financial security and decrease the risk faced by working-age women. By creating a basic wage that applies to all workers, regardless of gender, minimum wage laws can create the idea of equal compensation for equal work. This can support labor market fairness and assist eliminate gender-based wage discrepancies. By raising earnings in industries where women are disproportionately employed in low-paying positions, minimum wage laws can also help to mitigate occupational segregation. The gender pay gap can be reduced if women make more money in certain industries if the minimum wage is raised (Belser, P. & Rani, U).

### **As a floor for social security benefits**

In India, the minimum wage acts as a reference point for many labor-related issues, such as social security benefits. While Social Security payments are not directly tied to the minimum wage, they can influence how

certain benefits are determined. The National Pension System (NPS), the Employees State Insurance (ESI) program and the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) through which India provides social security to its workers. These programs are intended to give workers in the organized sector perks and financial stability.

The following are some indirect ways that the minimum wage may affect social security benefits:

1. The minimum wage can serve as a point of reference for figuring out how much to contribute to other schemes, such as ESI and EPF. For the purpose of computing these payments, employers may utilize a portion of the minimum wage.
2. Certain social security programs may have income-based eligibility requirements, and eligibility can be assessed using the minimum wage. For instance, eligibility for the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) under the NPS is based on specific income levels.
3. The amount of pension that is paid under programs such as the National Pension System may depend on contributions paid during workforce time. The final pension amount is indirectly affected by the minimum wage as it is likely to change the contribution level.

It is worth noting the complexity of India's social security programs, which can change depending on a number of variables, including type of job, industry and the particular plan. The minimum wage is just one of the numerous variables that might affect social security payments; for detailed information about these benefits, it is best to speak with the appropriate authorities or specialists.

## **Conclusion**

Wages are broadly defined in economic theory as any financial remuneration that an employer pays to its employees under a contract in exchange for the services they provide. In actuality, wages are really paid to employees in the form of basic pay as well as other benefits that are related to the pay, such as dearness allowances. Historically, workers had little say over the amount of wages they were paid since they lacked any negotiating power. In the Indian context, shortly after independence, the government established the Committee on Fair Wages in 1948. This committee defined a number of wage concepts that now guide the nation's wage structure, particularly in those industries where workers lack the ability to form unions and can

therefore be considered underpaid. An employer is required to pay a minimum wage to their employees regardless of their financial situation. The aforementioned committee points out that the minimum wage is the amount that must cover both the employees' basic needs and their ability to continue working effectively. For this reason, the minimum wage must cover part of the costs of public services, education and healthcare. Following the committee's report, the government passed the Minimum Wage Act of 1948, which enacted minimum wages. The idea of setting minimum wages also known as need-based minimum wages was developed in 1957 by the Indian Labour Conference. The Conference recommended, first of all, that the conventional working-class family be considered to consist of three consumption units for the wage earner; When calculating salaries, the income of women, children and adolescents should be ignored. Second, the net consumption of 2,700 calories per adult should be used to determine minimum dietary needs. An estimate of 18 yards of clothes per person per year should be used to determine the amount of clothing needed. When it comes to housing, the standard should be the lowest rent set by the government in any given location for homes given to low-income individuals through subsidized housing programs. 20% of the overall minimum wage should go for fuel, lighting, and other incidental expenses. India plans to replace its minimum wage system by 2025 with a living wage. The goal of the transition from minimum to living wages is to accelerate efforts to protect and uplift millions of people out of poverty. 90% of India's more than 500 million workers belong to the unorganized sector. Although many earn at least Rs. 176 per day, there are differences in wage payments as the national wage has not changed since 2017 and cannot be implemented state by state. Various states are giving their employees compensation as a result of this stagnation in wage growth (The Economic Times, 2024).

The 2019 Code on Wages, which has not yet been put into effect, suggests a wage floor that will apply to all states after it is put into effect. India joined the ILO as one of its founding members and has been a permanent member of its executive committee since 1922. A belief exists that substituting living wages for minimum wages could expedite India's attempts to lift millions of its citizens out of poverty while maintaining their well-being. New Delhi is working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Since these metrics are used to assess India's multifaceted national poverty, the ILO had suggested that the UN organization consider health, education, and standard of living as critical indicators for defining living wages for developing nations.

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## Modi's Foreign Policy: Examining India's Rise as a Global Power

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### Abstract

*India has gained recognition as a worldwide power since the beginning of the 21st century, establishing itself as an emerging powerhouse. The ongoing general elections in India also encompass discussions on India's foreign policy. Leaders from the ruling party assert that under the leadership of Narendra Modi, India's status has risen, and he has played a crucial role in enhancing India's reputation and gaining international admiration. Nevertheless, people on the opposing political side often doubt these claims. The international community perceives India as weak due to its unfavourable socioeconomic indicators and limited capacity to effectively address global strategic challenges. Following the ascension of the Modi government, India's presence and influence at the global level significantly strengthened. The Indian government persistently upholds its interests and provides help to its surrounding South Asian countries. India is crucial in resolving global issues and conflicts through diplomatic discussions and nonviolent means. India counters and retaliates against China's hostility and replies in an appropriate and fitting manner. Hence, Western nations, particularly the United States, regard India as a global power capable of challenging China's malevolent ambitions. This study analyses the measures and policies implemented by the Modi government since 2014 to enhance the standing of India. Additionally, it will evaluate the efficacy of these policies and the obstacles they encounter worldwide to enhance them.*

**Keywords:** Modi Government, foreign policy, China, South Asia, Proactive

### Introduction

India's rise at the global level shows that the world is becoming multipolar in nature (Kukreja 2020). India's critical role in South Asia is to challenge China's aggression and expansion in

the region and at the global level, and it is getting appreciation from Western countries like the USA, the U.K., and other parts of the world. Many policy initiatives such as 'Make in India,' 'Digital India,' 'Smart Cities, and 'Namami Gange' have taken the Modi government to invite investment in India from foreign countries and 'Indian Diaspora' for the development of India (ICWA 2023). On the other hand, the Indian government is also investing in developing neighbouring countries in South Asia to strengthen its relationships with the region.

The Modi administration is prioritising investment in energy projects and forging strategic relationships with other nations. Nevertheless, the China and Pakistan alliance poses significant challenges to India's economic security and its aspirations to establish itself as a global force. Upon gaining power in 2014, Modi initiated efforts to enhance diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries. As a result, he selected Bhutan as his inaugural foreign destination. India must enhance its diplomatic ties with its neighbouring countries to attain superpower status. C. Raja Mohan correctly emphasised that a country cannot establish itself as a legitimate global force without maintaining long-lasting dominance in its immediate vicinity (Rajamohan 2007, pp. 8-14 ).

Hence, Modi is endeavouring to enhance its diplomatic ties with surrounding nations. Modi primarily emphasises promoting trade, energy, security, infrastructure, connectivity, and cultural activities in South Asia (Bajpae 2016). Modi recently visited several smaller nations, such as Fiji, Mongolia, and Mauritius, which had not been visited by an Indian prime minister in a long time. Additionally, Modi visited Canada after a gap of 40 years, Sri Lanka after a decade, and Nepal after 17 years. (Ranjan 2019) During his visits, he actively engaged in several high-level activities. The multilateral organisations include ASEAN, BRICS, G-20, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, SAARC, U.N., and others. Under the leadership of the Modi government, India's contribution to making crucial decisions at the global level was widely recognised and praised. However the change debate is much nuanced than appearance (Ganguly 2017).

## **India's Foreign Policy before 2014**

Post-Independence India was born in a situation where India's foreign policy under the Nehru government was mainly concerned about the nation's domestic challenge and economic revitalisation. Nehru's foreign policy concerned peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, respect for territorial and integral sovereignty, non-alignment with the world, and work for peace. Vinod Khobragade argued that The Nehruvian Foreign policy prioritised anti-colonialism/imperialism, non-alignment, Panchsheel, international peace, and self-sufficiency as the means to achieve economic advancement while having little faith in foreign investment and free trade (Khobragade 2015, pp. 44-59). However, India's foreign policy was more realistic during the Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi governments and worked to improve its national interest and strengthen its international relations. When India fought the Indo-China war in 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965, 1971 role of India in the liberation of east Pakistan as Bangladesh showed that India started strengthening its defence sectors to fight against invaders like China and the country that gave shelter to terrorists to attack the Indian territory, Pakistan. The Indian defence budget was \$1.83 billion in 1970, \$14.29 billion in 2000, and 2019 \$71.12 billion in 2019. It shows that India understood that by strengthening its defence and army, India could fight globally against any country that worked against Indian interests and its territory. During the Cold War, India felt less secure; now, China-Pakistan has challenged India's security concerns. So, security was the primary concern in India's foreign policy before and after 2014. S.D. Muni argued that India's security worries changed due to partition, which created Pakistan as a hostile neighbour, communist China's armed seizure of Tibet, which impacted Himalayan security, and the Cold War (Muni 2014, pp. 28-30). Before 2014, many governments got into power with the support of coalition partners, which created hurdles in decision-making. These obstacles affected India's relationship with its neighbouring countries from around the globe. I.K. Gujral's doctrine focuses on non-reciprocity, and under this doctrine, South Asian countries should not compromise their territorial integrity in favour of any other country in the area.

The Gujral doctrine provided a unilateral concession to neighbours in the sub-continent without seeking reciprocity. Gujral doctrine targeted for being a more soft stand on Pakistan (Murthy

1999). In contrast, the The Bajpayi government made efforts to enhance India's diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries and the international community. Later In 1998, India demonstrated its nuclear capabilities by executing Pokhran-2, resulting in sanctions imposed by the United States and Japan (The Economic Times, 2018). Furthermore, the gap between India, the U.S., and Japan got normal when U.S. President Bill Clinton visited India in March 2000, and India's connection with the U.S. was normalised. At the same time, Manmohan Singh's government was a busier coalition government that made the coalition partners very happy, which affected foreign policy with foreign powers. Manmohan Singh's government tried to improve its relations with China and Pakistan and a nuclear deal with the U.S. in 2008. Before 2014, governments' decisions were affected due to pressure from coalition partners. Conversely, when Modi assumed power in 2014, a majority government was responsible for every decision it took for the nation.

### **India's rise under the Modi Era**

After Modi assumed power in 2014, He won control by spreading the development of the Gujarat model. Industrialists and Media were liberal, so he got support from the Media and Industrialist classes. After coming to power, Modi wanted to escape the image of riots in Gujarat in 2002, for which the U.S. banned him from travelling to travel in the U.S. Modi promised to bring 'Achhe Din' (Good Days) and Kaala Dhan (Black Money). He was a volunteer of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevk Sangh), a right-wing organisation in India that continuously worked to make India a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation). Experts thought that India's foreign policy would affect Hindu nationalism. Modi tried to make a balance between his Hindutva ideology and foreign policy.

After coming to power, he first invited all the heads of government of SAARC countries to his swearing-in ceremony on May 26, 2014. His intentions were evident as he wanted to improve trade and economic prosperity in the South Asian region. Ian Hall argued that the "Modi government's much-publicized attempt to uproot Jawaharlal Nehru's domestic and foreign

policy” (Rajagopalan 2020, p. 184). Hall further claimed that most of the Modi government’s foreign policy from 2014 to 2019 stayed the same, but his administration successfully modified the country’s foreign investment regime. Like C. Raja Mohan, many experts say that Modi’s foreign continued the Vajpayee government from 1998 to 2004 and the UPA governments from 2004 to 2014. Still, he brought a few policy changes under his government.

C. Raja Mohan argued that Modi seeks to boost India's national power by expanding economic growth, foreign direct investment, and military modernisation. He said that Modi stressed regional diplomacy based on the five principles needed to become a great power. First, India should restore its relevance in South Asia and become an undisputed regional power before becoming global. Second, Modi has visited India's neighbours more than any other Indian prime leader. Third, Modi recognises the federal government's role in foreign policy, unlike his predecessor. Fourth, Modi understood that the Indian diaspora invests in India and boosts its image overseas. Fifth, Modi believes that a unified and wealthy Subcontinent will strengthen India's relations with large nations like China and the U.S. (Mohan 2017). India’s relations with the west also improved through trade, investment, and bilateral ties. Modi made India’s Neighbourhood India’s ‘Neighbourhood first policy’ and Look East Policy, Act East Policy to get regional and regional connectivity with South Asia and ASEAN.

### **India’s foreign policy under the leadership of Modi**

Modi continuously invites investment through domestic policies such as Make in India, Digital India, Namami Gange, etc. Chintamani Mahapatra argued that the Japanese prime minister pledged \$35 billion in investment to India over the next five years, the Chinese president pledged \$20 billion, and he may get \$40 billion in American capital (Mahapatra 2014, p. 234). Due to Modi’s diplomatic skills, India emerged as the international market for foreign powers. Modi is working to make India a Vibrant Bharat by inviting foreign investment.

Mahapatra argued that Mahapatra's observations Modi's foreign policy is focused on enhancing India's economic prosperity, bolstering its military strength, and establishing itself as a prominent leader in global politics. The Western world desires India to implement reforms in line with neo-liberal economic concepts. (ibid, p. 238). Modi's government focuses on the inclusive growth and development of all. Modi's security policy is clearly demonstrated by India's strategic decision to carry out a 'Surgical strike' on suspected militants in Pakistan. This action was taken in direct response to a lethal attack on Indian troops in Uri in 2016, with the primary objective of safeguarding the national interest. By doing this act of Surgical Strike, Modi got two advantages, and he showed the world that India was not going to any nation attack India's territory. Second, Modi won the trust and appreciation of the Indian Public. India's foreign policy changed in nature; now, India responds to those who invade its territory; for example, China created issues in Doklam, but India fought for the national interest of India by opposing China on the Doklam Issue.

Through the 'Maan Ki Baat,' Chai Pe Charcha are the tools through which Modi gets public support and connects his ideas with people so he can also deal with India's foreign policy without any interruption and disruption with the confidence and support of people. Fighting against the China-Pakistan Nexus is also critical for India, so India is strengthening its relationships with Western powers like the U.S. and U.K. to counter China's aggression. China has objected to India's inclusion in the Nuclear Supplier Group, which has been a setback for India. India has faced another obstacle as China has declined to endorse India's request to classify Masood Azhar, the leader of the Pakistan-based extremist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammad, as a terrorist at the United Nations. China's One Belt, One Road initiative has encountered an issue whereby several nations, including Sri Lanka, have obtained loans. As a result, China has been granted a 99-year lease for Sri Lanka's Hambantota port.

Modi Utilized Soft power as a solid instrument to strengthen India's relations with the world further. He made an effort to make June 21 the International Yoga Day for the United Nations and succeeded. India also provided humanitarian assistance to Yemen under 'Operation Rahat' and 'Operation Maitri' in Nepal. Surendra Kumar said that India was the 'first responder' to

help in disaster situations. Surendra argued that ‘India also accepted a U.N. ruling and surrendered claims to a section of the Bay of Bengal. Modi’s policy priorities the, as Surendra said, three Cs- connectivity, cooperation, and contact, which includes linking the region through energy, roads, trades, and people-to-people contact” (Surendra Kumar 2016, p. 101).

S.D. Pradhan (2022) argued that India joined the Quad for Indi-Pacific with the U.S., Japan, and Australia to seek a common rules-based order for the region based on equality for all nations in this geographical region (Pradhan 2022). India joined the other Quad for West Asia with the U.S., UAE, and Israel for economic prosperity. Pradhan (2022) argued that India continues the meetings with Russia, RIC, and BRICS. With Russia, closer links have been established between Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries, and efforts are to operationalise the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

India, in addition to Iran, has successfully established the Chahar port and is currently seeking an alternative to the Tapi gas pipeline (Pradhan 2022). Modi's endeavour to employ the Security and Growth for All Regions (SAGAR) initiative is driven by economic and strategic needs. It has been utilised to establish enduring and intimate connections with India.

After Coming to Power, he continuously stresses ‘Effective Multilateralism,’ which captures the reality of the rise of many nations and gives equal importance to all the nations, irrespective of the size and capability of the nations or few countries that should shape the world order. Modi is the Prime minister who started visiting a small nation like Mongolia in 2015 and upgraded the comprehensive partnership to a strategic partnership. In the year 2016, Modi visited Vietnam, Israel in 2017, Canada, and UAE after a long gap with any Indian prime minister.

Pradhan said that “Modi tried to integrate foreign policy with domestic economic interests” by inviting Foreign direct investment under domestic policies such as ‘Make in India,’ Digital India,’ Skill India,’ etc (Pradhan 2022). On the other hand, Modi’s efforts and activities to open a 42 crore bank account, provide Mudra Yojana (29 crore loan), and provide electricity and water sanitation are getting the support of the Indian public.

## **India and Indian Diaspora**

Indian diaspora is getting more critical throughout the world. Modi recognised this strength and utilised it for the development of India. Modi addressed the large gathering of Indian diaspora living in foreign countries whenever he visited. Indian Diaspora consists of people born in India who have moved to other countries for well-being and development. Modi interacted with the Indian diaspora from around the globe, including Canada, the U.S., Japan, Fiji, Singapore, Australia, European Union countries, etc. Surendra Kumar said, "Modi addressed 17000 people of Indian origin at San Jose, California, and over 70000 people in Wembley Stadium, London" (Surendra Kumar 2016, p. 100).

S.D. Pradhan asserts that Modi fearlessly utilises the Indian diaspora to establish advantages in foreign nations, elevating their status to significant political entities in the respective host countries (Pradhan 2022). According to the United Nations statistics, India has the highest number of people living outside their home country, known as the diaspora, with 18 million individuals in 2020. The countries with the largest populations of Indian migrants are the UAE, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia (The Economic Times, 2021). So, Modi uses the Indian diaspora to attract and invite them to invest in India to develop the nation. Through Yoga, Bollywood movies like Amir Khan's movies are getting appreciated in China, which further helps strengthen the countries' relations.

## **India and South Asia**

From the beginning, Modi knew that he would improve the situation and relations with its neighbouring countries as he was more committed to promoting regional peace and economic integration. Anil Baluni contended that the Modi government's emphasis on the 'neighbourhood first policy' is driven by India's desire to project itself as a nation that is experiencing simultaneous economic and strategic growth and is willing to extend the benefits of this growth



to its neighbouring countries. This approach is based on the understanding that a prosperous neighbourhood leads to a prosperous region (Baluni 2021).

Modi's Proactive role with his neighbours shows that he is working to improve the region's economic, social, and cultural bonds. His stable and robust government helped him make decisions without delay and did not affect his relations with his neighbours. According to C. Raja Mohan, Modi has demonstrated an appreciation for the reality that the nation's boundaries are the starting point for foreign policy by engaging with its neighbouring countries and developing political connectivity through discussion. This is a truth that has been largely overlooked (Mohan 2014). S. Jaishankar often discussed "Positive Unilateralism" to underline India's 'neighbourhood first' initiative. At that time, the foreign minister Sushma Swaraj focused on the 3C Mantras as Commerce, Culture, and Connectivity with the neighbours in the region.

Ian Hall suggested that Indian prime ministers possess greater autonomy in foreign policy decision-making compared to other democratic leaders, primarily due to the concentration of power within the core executive and limited levels of legislative and public involvement. In addition, Hall contended that the Modi administration altered the discourse of Indian foreign policy to circumvent the influence and consequences of the Nehru government. Instead, they adopted the vocabulary associated with the Hindu nationalist ideology, which traces its roots to the philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghosh (Hall 2020). Modi's government's policies and principles are mostly related to his Hindutva agenda, and some of the policies target the minority community of the country.

Modi is also putting more effort into Soft power to strengthen foreign policy in the South Asian region and on the world stage. Ian Hall asserts that Modi's initial administration made substantial investments in diverse endeavours, such as the worldwide advocacy of Yoga and Solar power, as well as a sequence of interreligious and intercultural discussions, including various Buddhist and Muslim factions (Hall 2014, pp. 113-131). But when it comes to hard power, Modi tries to balance it, and the expert calls it mixed power. That's why Modi made

many visits to his neighborhoods to make them that India is ready to improve the people's lives in the region. S.D. Muni talks about the four dimensions of Modi's foreign policy as Modi is working more on these dimensions. The first is Contact and Confidence building; as I said earlier, Modi, the foreign minister, and senior officials visited its neighborhood under this dimension. Modi visited Afghanistan, and his surprise visit to Pakistan in 2015 was an effort to improve the relations in the region. His proactive action made him visit Srilanka; after 28 years of the gap, a prime minister of India visited Srilanka. In the case of Nepal, an Indian prime minister visited Nepal after 17 years. So, he tried to contact and connect with the region's countries.

A Walk to Talk is the second dimension to strengthening relations with its neighbourhood. Under this dimension, Modi's proactive role worked to "Activate and expand bilateral cooperation and bridge India's chronic foreign policy delivery deficit" (Muni 2017, p. 123). During Modi's visit, India's neighbors extended soft loans of U.S. \$1 billion and US2\$ billion to Nepal and Bangladesh. The third dimension is all about Modi's use of soft power. Modi worked, and cooperation happened in the areas of Health and Education. During Modi's visit to his neighborhood, he promised to enhance the number of scholarships offered by India to students of the South Asian region and cooperate in the fields of education, health, flood, earthquake, etc. Modi utilized soft power by visiting the Hindu and Buddha temples in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Ian Hall argued that Modi's first term government, from 2014 to 2019, invested heavily in various initiatives, including the global promotion of Yoga and Solar power and a series of inter-religious and intercultural dialogues with different Buddhist and Muslim groups (Hall 2020. P. 185). Muni talks about the fourth dimension, which is about the security cooperation with the Neighbors to fight against terrorism in the region. Modi also worked on India's security relations with the U.S., and India intervened in Myanmar against the terrorist groups with the consent of the government of Myanmar.

S.D.Muni identified five problems of India towards its neighbors: the lack of a balanced political perspective, the power differential, India's economic clout, extra-regional powers, mindsets, diplomatic styles, and personalities. He also argued that India's Bilateral and avoidable attitude

toward its neighbours creates fears that make neighbours suspicious of India's activity. So, the lack of connectivity and the philosophy of India created problems with neighbours in the region. Muni argued that "the smaller neighbours felt the lack of political attention and the investment of needed economic and diplomatic resources on India's part. Modi's inheritance concerning India's neighbours (Muni 2017, p. 119).

### Challenges

Happymon Jacob said, "India wants its neighbours to avoid making and interacting with countries of the region (like China), and India can continue its engagement outside of the region, not its neighbours from the region, which is affecting the relations of India in the region. India's outer support in the campaign to promote Coalition led by Maithripala Sirisena to defeat his opposite leader Mahinda Rajapaksa, whose 'anti-Tamil record and pro-china tilt was resented by New Delhi' (Jacob 2022). Unnecessary intervention in a sovereign nation to affect the election and policy will put India's relations in danger in the future, so India has to avoid such activities. But when he visited India, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe denied such misinformation on India's role in the Sri Lankan election. Western countries especially criticised the Sri Lankan government for the violation of Human rights, which is causing Sri Lanka to move toward China. So, the increasing presence of China in development projects like the Colombo port city projects and Sri Lanka's cooperation with the One Belt, One Road initiatives are affecting India's economic and security interests in the region.

While India's relations with Pakistan have worsened, experts say that Under the current government, the relations between India, Nepal, and Pakistan have become worse than in the previous Indian government. India and Pakistan dialogue failed many times. Pakistan's move toward China is creating problems for the region's countries, and specifically, its uncooperative attitude is also weakening the fight against the common issues of South Asia. As Muni said, "The biggest challenge now before the Modi government is to engage with Pakistan without compromising on its present stand constructively," and he said, "India has seen prime ministers

come and go, but the bureaucratic structure has remained in place” (Muni 2014, pp. 29-30). Muni said that ‘India’s Neighbourhood First policy is being impacted by the domestic agenda. The small countries from the South Asian region are playing the China card as they are getting closer to China than to India, as China is providing loans and financial assistance.

## Conclusion

During the time that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been in charge, there is no question that India's influence has considerably increased. For the purpose of elevating India's standing, he has worked on multiple fronts. It is of utmost significance that he emphasises contact with members of the Indian diaspora. However, we have also witnessed the cracks that have occurred in the global diaspora due to Rahul Gandhi's visit to the United States. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the projection of Yoga and other forms of soft power has also been commendable. Nevertheless, the question remains: to what extent are these soft power initiatives useful without concrete measures of hard power? And the most significant challenges India faces are posed by China, India's most powerful and provocative neighbour. China is becoming more and more present in the South Asian region, which is causing India to be apprehensive. India is being pushed to the background, posing a challenge to India's economic and security concerns, given that most of the countries in the region are currently welcoming China to their territory with open arms. As an alternative, the neighbours in the region are employing the China card to confront India's condescending attitude. India needs to work closely with its neighbours, ensure that jobs are completed on time, and refrain from acting like a big brother to enhance its relations with its neighbours.

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## Revisiting 'Paite' in History

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### Abstract

*The article aims to revisit and examine the historical journey of the Paite community within the larger Zo ethnic group, primarily by analyzing existing literature. It does not intend to disrupt the established chronological narrative or make any definitive claims, but rather it looks into the historical epistemology of the ontological 'presence' of a group who developed a separate entity during the post-colonial era, determined by time and space. The article endeavors to investigate the process through which this group developed a sense of self-definition, taking into account factors such as language, culture, politics, and other influential elements that contributed to their identity formation.*

**Keywords:** paite, historical epistemology, identity formation self-definition, tribe recognition.

### Introduction

Epistemological constraints tending to history and its forms of writing are most seen in the discrepancy or difference between the data or knowledge we currently possess and the specific topic, subject, or area that we want to understand or investigate. With this there is a challenge on the part of the historian on the question of epistemology. By laying interest on the past and claiming to know the truth about it may have otherwise posed another question—accuracy (Kosso 2009). Much more is the subjective nature of the human mind that in turn tends to give information that sufficed the interests of the writer. As such, raiding the unseen past requires an approach that imparts justice to what had happened and the impartial credibleness of what is being produced.

The Paites are a transborder tribe whose ancestral homeland stretches across the borders of India and Myanmar (Kamkhenthang 1998). Their traditional settlements were mainly in southern Manipur, northeastern Mizoram, parts of Assam in India, and the Chin State in Myanmar. The name 'Paite' itself, meaning 'to go/move in group,' was given to them by neighboring tribes, referring to their mobility lifestyle. Like many other names used for the Paites over time, this was a term assigned



by outsiders based on their own convenience and perspectives. For pre-literate societies like the Paites, accurately representing themselves to the outside world was a challenge. Behind the differing names and descriptions lies a diverse array of identities and groups that have become entwined with the modern understanding of who the Paites are. Records and writings from the colonial era, while valuable historical resources, are often filled with contradictory information and biases, blurring the line between fact and fiction. Researchers have worked to untangle the true origins and history of the Paites, sifting through the maze of references and interpretations about them. This task is made harder by the lack of written records from the Paites themselves, as their cultural heritage was primarily passed down through oral traditions and lived experiences rather than texts. Still, the Paites have persevered through generations of migration and cross-border interactions. Their ability to adapt while maintaining core customs has allowed their identity to endure. Their resilience is a testament to the Paites' deep ties to their settlements and customs despite the challenges.

### **Locating the Paites in the Written Word**

'The indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker' (Goldie 2003, 232). Here, the term 'chess board' is used metaphorically to represent the black-white dichotomy or the contrast between two distinct groups. However, the primary aim was to highlight how the indigenous population was labeled and categorized by foreign invaders in their accounts. This metaphor reflects the situation faced by the Paite community during the colonial era, where they were subjected to such categorization by the colonial powers.

In the colonial accounts, the term Paite appears to have been used rather nominally and infrequently. G.A. Grierson (1904) employed it to refer to a language spoken by the Poi or Pai people, which he speculated to be a Northern Chin dialect. Lieutenant Colonel J. Shakespear (2008), on the other hand, used the terms Paihte and Vuite interchangeably. Shakespear's account reveals that the term Paihte originated from the Lushai language, while the people being referred to preferred the term Vuite. However, his assertion that Vuitea and Paihte were the sons of Lamleia appears to be an unconvincing misinterpretation. E.W. Dun's (1992) account from 1886 mentions that the Suktis (or Sukte) or Kamhau or Wite (Guite) clan, under their chief Yatol (Zatual Sukte), migrated to Manipur due to pressure from the Pois. Dun also identified Sumkam as the chief of the Simmte (Simte), who appears

to have been a Guite chief succeeding his father, Goukthohtang. In separate chapters, Carey and Tuck (2008) traced the histories of the Sokte and Nwite alongside the Thados and Yos. Alexander Mackenzie's *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (1884) delved extensively into Manipur's contact with the Kamhows or Sooties, where he, like others, used these names interchangeably to signify the same people. The various colonial accounts reveal a lack of consistency and clarity in the terminology used to refer to the ethnic group now known as the Paites. Different writers employed terms such as Paite, Poi, Pai, Vuite, Sukte, Kamhau, Wite, Simmte, Sokte, and Nwite, often using them interchangeably or in reference to the same community. This inconsistency likely stemmed from limited knowledge, linguistic barriers, and indirect contact between the colonial authorities and the communities they were attempting to document.

The accounts mentioned suggest there were various references to similar groups of people who came into contact or whose existence was known through other sources in the borderlands between Colonial India and Colonial Burma. Before and after British arrival, there was no modern concept of a shared national identity or collective sense of peoplehood. Compounding this, these were preliterate societies, leaving scant written sources to discern the nature of the encountered groups. Despite lacking an overarching cohesive identity, these communities exhibited certain collective behaviors and forms of social organization. At the most basic level, they organized into clan or village-based units. These smaller entities formed the foundation for any group actions or collective behaviors. Additionally, there existed a broader pattern of collective behavior driven by necessity or external threats. In such situations, chiefs from the same or different clans would come together and unite their groups, effectively forming larger coalitions or alliances. This collective mobilization aimed to counter any impending external dangers through combined strength.<sup>1</sup> While these early forms of collective identity were largely localized and fragmented, a more cohesive shared identity began to emerge towards the latter stages of colonial rule. Over time, these earlier clan or village-based entities evolved into more structured organizations that represented a common entity distinct from their previous forms. This shared identity found fuller expression in the form of various organizations that sprouted during the post-colonial period, each advocating for different interests and causes. The transition from localized clan-based identities to a broader sense of collective belonging was a gradual process, shaped by the experiences of colonialism and the necessity for unified action. The post-colonial era witnessed the

proliferation of these organized entities, reflecting the diverse interests and aspirations of the previously fragmented communities.

### The Invention of Alphabet

Before the advent of the British, *non-literacy* or *orality* characterizes the indigenes. James C. Scott was of the view that at some point of time, they had had their own scripts and system of writing but in due course 'lost' it when evading 'states' or when subsumed under state organization (Scott 2009). As such, they have lost 'literacy' and their histories were passed on through oral tradition.

The acquisition of the art of reading and writing was witnessed during colonial period. Christian missionaries played a significant role in the invention of alphabets for their colonized subjects. 'Bringing preliterate peoples in the world of letters and formal schooling is, of course, a *raison d'être* of the developmental state' (Scott 2009, 220). In 1903, a Christian missionary, David E. Jones and a native T. Vialphung collaborated to invent alphabet and number system using the Roman pattern for the Paites and in the same year published a primer, *Bubul*. In 1941 a hymn book called *Paite Kristian Labu* was published which was followed by the publication of *Paite Sintung (Paite Primer)* by Rev. H. Nengzachin. Again, in 1951, a combination of the *Old Testament* and the *Book of Psalm* was published (Tawmbing 2008). These trends show the development of literature tending to the Paites which later came to form the basis of future writing system practiced within the community. Later developments also witnessed the publication of a number of books, magazines, and newspapers and the intended readership remains the users of the Paite dialect, but in some cases, it may reach a wider readership, for example, the newspapers.

The efforts of Christian missionaries to create written alphabets for each of the Zo 'tribes' they encountered marked a momentous event that introduced these communities to knowledge beyond their immediate world. By the 1930s, almost all Zo ethnic groups had their own alphabets based on the Roman script, such as Lushei (1894), Paite (1903), Mara (1907), Tedim (1910), and others. This development, while revolutionary, also posed a potential threat to the unity of these communities. Since the 1940s, various pan-ethnic groups have emerged among the Zos in Manipur, primarily organized around their respective dialects. Despite their socio-cultural homogeneity, this dialect-based

distinction fostered a tendency where speakers of a particular dialect began to develop a sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ in defining their differences from other groups. The introduction of written scripts allowed these communities to access knowledge and ideas that were previously unknown to them, opening up their horizons beyond their immediate surroundings. However, this development also inadvertently contributed to the creation of new divisions and identities within the broader Zo community. While the Zo ethnic groups shared significant socio-cultural similarities, the emphasis on dialect-based distinctions led to the emergence of different pan-ethnic organizations, each representing a particular dialect group. Organizations such as the Vaiphei National Organisation (1944), Kuki National Assembly (1947), Paite National Council (1949), United Manipur Jomi Organisation (1948), Hmar National Congress (1954), Simte National Council (1957), Tedim-Chin Union (1961), and others arose during this period (Suan 2009). This proliferation of dialect-based organizations, while aiming to represent the interests of their respective communities, also highlighted the growing tendency for speakers of a particular dialect to perceive themselves as distinct from others. The notion of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ began to take root, with dialects serving as markers of difference and separate identities within the larger Zo community. While the Christian missionaries' efforts to introduce written alphabets opened new avenues for knowledge and literacy, it also inadvertently contributed to the fragmentation of the Zo community along dialect lines. This development posed a challenge to the preservation of their socio-cultural unity, as newly formed organizations prioritized dialect-based identities over their shared heritage and commonalities.

### **The Post-colonial<sup>2</sup> Paite**

In the colonial period, there existed multiple terms or signifiers that were employed to denote the same group of people. This phenomenon could be partially attributed to the constrained knowledge possessed by the colonial authorities overseeing the region. Alternatively, it may have stemmed from a lack of direct interaction between the colonizers and the Paites during the time when ethnographic monographs documenting these communities were being produced. One notable instance highlighting this variation in terminology can be found in the account provided by Shakespear. He remarked that the clan generally referred to as ‘Vuite’ was broadly recognized among the Lushais as ‘Paihte’ (Shakespear 2008). Throughout his written record, Shakespear utilized these two designations

interchangeably when alluding to this particular clan or community. The existence of such discrepancies in nomenclature underscores the complexities inherent in attempting to accurately chronicle and catalog the diverse ethnic and cultural groups encountered during the era of colonial exploration and administration.

According to Gregory Bateson, for our minds and perceptions to comprehend something as distinct, there must exist at least two entities that can be differentiated from each other. Individually, each entity lacks definable essence - it is neither being nor non-being, but rather an unknowable, imperceptible phenomenon akin to the futile attempt of clapping with one hand (Bateson 2002). Ethnic groups,<sup>3</sup> or ethnies, can be understood as communities bound by shared ancestral origins, collective myths and memories, and other solidifying factors that cultivate a sense of unity. However, this notion of a unified ethnic identity is contingent upon perceived divergences from other groups. The ethnic 'self' cannot be constructed in isolation, but emerges through continuous processes of inclusion and exclusion, sameness and differentiation, in relation to contrasting 'others.' As Joane Nagel describes, ethnicity arises through a dialectical process involving both internal self-identification and external ascription by outsiders - what you believe your ethnic identity to be versus how others define your ethnicity: 'what *you* think your ethnicity is, versus what *they* think your ethnicity is' (Nagel 1994, 154).<sup>4</sup>

Nagel's self-identification is almost similar to what Anthony D. Smith calls 'self-definition,' where the latter stressed on the importance of, other than self-definition, 'myth and memory making,' 'territorialization,' 'public culture,' and 'legal standardization'<sup>5</sup> for the formation of ethnic identity. Pulling it to a further extend, the idea of self-definition also required others factors; while the above criteria did play a significant role in the process of ethnic formation, the 'imagination'<sup>6</sup> of the people involved must also be put into consideration. Because, according to Benedict Anderson, 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006, 6). The determining factors to this 'imagined community' besides language, culture, ethnic identity and the like is the presence of the 'other.'

In the light of the above approaches, the foundation of Paite National Council (PNC, now Paite Tribe Council) on 27 June, 1949 marked a significant event in the history of the Paites. The process of self-definition was fostered by the then identity crisis witnessed in Manipur in the 1940s (Kamkhenthang

1990). There was no consensus among all the Zo ethnic groups to be encircled within the fold of Kuki National Assembly, which eventually led to the formation of Khul Union. The Khul Union also did not meet with the interest of the groups which were initially under the Union. As a result, within a couple of years after its formation, the Union broke up into different pan-ethnic organizations that search for their own interests. Nengkhanpau Hauzel wrote that after the Khul Union broke up, the Paites became conscious of their existence and progress and preserve their cultural identity which eventually led to the formation of the Paite National Council. He wrote further, 'The main objective of the new party at that time was to preserve their language and ethnic identity' (Hauzel 1987, 32-33).

Side by side with being a preserver of language and ethnic identity, the PNC also served as a pressure group in its initial existence. In the 1951 general election, T.Thangkhai was put forth by the PNC to be a candidate for the Member of Parliament. However, since Paite was not a recognized tribe in Manipur, his candidature was nullified on the ground that 'Paite is neither a Kuki nor a Naga nor a Lushai' and that the seat is reserved for any of these recognized tribes.<sup>7</sup> Then, in 1955, the PNC submitted a memorandum to the Minister, Home Affairs, Government of India demanding the recognition of 'Paite' as a 'distinct tribe' having 'their own village rule, their own customs, language, literature and culture.'<sup>8</sup> The memorandum also provided a statement regarding the distinctiveness of the Paites:

In the first edition of the Primer written in Lushei language when the British first took up the administration of Lushai Hills (Now, Mizo District) it is written that 'there were no particular ruling class among the Lushais. But our other neighbouring tribes such as Paites, Shuktes, and Poites from time immemorial have been having ruling classes among them'. This also clearly testifies that the Paites are a distinct community.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of distinctiveness or 'cultural markers' used here in this memorandum is primarily language or dialect, culture, customs and traditions which in turns creates criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group who practice these symbols. Moreover, in congruence with the political environment of the time, it can also be asserted that ethnic groups can be manipulated to achieve societal status and political ends and also a competition among elites within the group or with other communities (Brass 1991). Adding to this is the assumption that the PNC was formed by the 'neo-literate or the intelligentsia Paites' (Siamkhum 2013, 194).

The Paites have long navigated the complexities of asserting their distinct identity while acknowledging their kinship with the broader Zomi community. In 1960, the Paite National Council (PNC) took a significant step by submitting a memorandum to the Indian Prime Minister, advocating for the reunification of the scattered Zomi peoples, including the Paites, under the banner of ‘Chin.’<sup>10</sup> This memorandum emphasised the Paites’ desire to unite with their brethren across national boundaries, recognizing their shared cultural heritage and ethnic roots. However, even as they championed this cause for a unified Zomi identity, the Paites remained steadfast in preserving their distinct cultural practices and traditions. Two decades later, in the 1980s, a new trend emerged within the Paite community. There was a growing inclination to embrace the larger ‘Zomi’ ethnic identity, acknowledging their kinship with other Zomi sub-groups. This shift did not negate the Paites’ separate cultural identity but rather allowed them to participate in a broader ethnic domain while retaining their distinct customs and practices. This duality of identity – embracing both the specific and the collective – has enabled the Paites to preserve their cultural heritage while fostering a sense of unity and shared belonging with their Zomi brethren across national borders.

The situation in Mizoram regarding ethnic identity formation differed from Manipur. While language played a crucial role in self-definition, the Paite only gained official tribal recognition in 2003. Ethnic consciousness had been growing since India’s independence, with demands for a regional council emerging in the 1960s. However, the Pataskar Commission rejected creating new councils at that time, stating existing ones were not meeting government expectations. Subsequently, organizations like the Mizoram Paite Organization, Siamsinpawlp, and Zomi/Paite Students’ Federation began advocating for Paite tribal recognition. This led to the formation of other Paite-exclusive groups such as the Mizoram Paite Cultural Society (1982), Paite National Council (1991) (formerly Paite Federation (1982)), and Mizoram Paite Union (2004). The gradual rise of these ethnic organizations highlights how demands for recognition built over decades before achieving success, unlike the more volatile situation in Manipur. Language reinforced identity, but institutional processes were key for formal recognition (Thansanga 2016). As a result, rather than just asserting their ethnic identity, the Paite had to navigate the institutional bureaucratic processes established by the Indian government for formalizing their tribal status. The formation of organizations gave them a unified voice to persistently make this demand over decades until it was finally granted through these official institutional mechanisms in 2003.

## Conclusion

By revisiting Paite in history, it can be well ascertained that language played a significant role in ethnic identification. The history of the Paites cannot be traced long back as Chiimnuai is commonly held as their origin. The case is much problematized as such concepts of ethnic identities of today is absent during the pre-literate period. Even more so is the absence of material and archaeological evidences possessed by this community, or to a greater extent, the Zos, which encourages speculations when studying their history. Nevertheless, the notion of historical change in historical continuity has determined the developmental trajectory pertaining to the formation of ethnic identities. What is important to note here is the fluidity of ethnic identity when forming ethnic boundary. Claims to exclusivity when forming identities might not turn out practical when considering movement of peoples either across international or national boundaries or, the rational choice of the members claimed. As a result, the article demonstrates how factors like language, cultural practices, colonial nomenclature, missionary influences, political reorganization, ethnic consciousness and institutional mechanisms all interacted and shaped the epistemological evolution of the Paite community's self-defined identity over time. Their experience exemplifies the complex interplay of internal and external forces that mold ethnic identity formation among marginalized groups.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more detail information see Ricky Vanlallawm Guite ed., *Guite Khangthu (History of Guite)* 2d ed. (Lamka: Laizom Society, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'post-colonial' used in this section would mean *historical period*—after the end of colonialism.

<sup>3</sup> Ethnic groups or *ethnies* (to use French term) can be defined as those communities which shared common ancestry, myths, memories and others factors that impart solidarity. See more Smith, "The genealogy of nations: An ethno-symbolic approach", in *When is the Nation? Towards an understanding of theories of nationalism*, ed. Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac (Routledge: London, 2005); Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*.

<sup>4</sup> Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture," *Social Problems*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Special Issue on Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America (Feb., 1994), 154.

<sup>5</sup> For more details see Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, Community, and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Ethnicity and International Relations (Jul., 1996), 445-458. Also, Smith, "Genealogy of nations," 94-112.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of 'imagination' is borrowed from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* where he laid out several criterias on how the nation is an imagined community. See more Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised edition; London: Verso, 2006), 5-7.



<sup>7</sup> “Memorandum of the Paite National Council (Demanding the recognition of the Paites as a distinct tribe of India), 1955.” Available at: [thianlalmuanngaihte.blogspot.in/2010/08/memorandum-of-paite-national-council.html](http://thianlalmuanngaihte.blogspot.in/2010/08/memorandum-of-paite-national-council.html). Accessed on: 16-10-2016.

<sup>8</sup> “Memorandum of the Paite.”

<sup>9</sup> “Memorandum of the Paite.”

<sup>10</sup> “Memorandum Submitted by the Paite National Council for Re-unification of the Zomis of India, Burma and Pakistan Under One Country, 1960” Available at: [http://sialkal.com/home\\_doc\\_PNC.htm](http://sialkal.com/home_doc_PNC.htm) Accessed on: 29-09-2016. While re-unification of the Zomis is stressed, the memorandum deals with the identity of ‘Chin.’

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## Ragpickers' Daily Struggles in Dealing with Urban Poverty in Mizoram: A Sociological Study

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### Abstract

*The job of rag picking is associated with severe inhumane challenges. Ragpickers are exposed to daily challenges that have a detrimental effect on their health and overall well-being. This paper focuses on the issues faced by the ragpickers on a daily basis and how their daily struggles affected them. The study also aims to highlight the social identity of the ragpickers and provide detailed insights into the intricate relationship between rag picking and stigmatisation. Data are collected from poor urban areas in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram, and the findings are intertwined with existing sociological concepts and theories, further showcasing the theoretical relevance of their struggles in mitigating urban poverty.*

Key words: Ragpickers, Mizoram, sociology, stigma, urban poor.

### Introduction

One of the rising global phenomena is urbanisation. As many as 55 per cent of the global population in today's world reside in urban areas. By the year 2050, this rate is expected to rise by 70 per cent and urban poor is also expected to increase at the same time (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2018). In an ever-progressing world today, more than half of the population and the world's economy are located in urban areas which is termed as 'urban century' (Walnycki 2014, 1). Most of the growth in population occurred in low and middle-income country in urban areas around the world and urban poor makes up a sizeable chunk of the population. The urban poor lack basic necessities and resources and their overall well-being is low. Amongst the urban poor, ragpickers form a large number of population and in India, their number is estimated to be anywhere between 1.5 million to 4 million (Pujari 2020).

Most of them are unrecognised by the government and have low standards of living. Mizoram is the 23<sup>rd</sup> state of India where social life is mainly community-based (Chatterji 1975, 2). Despite being a state where the prevailing social structure appreciates every individual, it houses a considerable number of ragpickers

who are burdened by poverty. They mostly reside in Tuirial Airfield locality in Aizawl. The dumping ground in Aizawl is located approximately 20 kilometers away from the main city area and this place serves as a working ground for the ragpickers. Almost all the ragpickers reside in the locality of Tuirial Airfield, Aizawl and all the residents in this locality engaged in the occupation of rag picking. The government do not keep a proper record of their exact number. They had lower socio-economic profiles as against the rest of the other localities in the city and they are located far-off from hospitals and health centers. Ragpickers in Aizawl typically belong to marginalised communities and engage in informal waste collection to earn a living. They collect recyclable materials like plastics, paper, and metals from garbage dumps and landfills, sort them, and then sell them to recycling factories at low rates. Many of them have faced socio-economic challenges and lack access to basic amenities. Despite efforts by NGOs and government agencies to provide support and improve their living conditions, significant improvements have not been witnessed even in recent times. Hence, the sociological study on the urban poverty issues faced by the ragpickers is of theoretical importance, especially in a rapid progressive world where their identities are ignored and are close to being invisible in society.

### **The formation of social identity**

In modern world, every country desire to established itself as a developed and progressive country. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this desire to become more developed and established became rapidly accelerated due to the onset of industrialisation and modernisation during this period (Kumari and Kiran 2021, 250). However, along with accelerated development comes various burden in which poverty and unemployment are one of them. Hence, in order to escape the situations of poverty, social migration occurs in which the geographical movement has 'consequences for group structure' (Startup 1971, 177). In the course of geographical migration and the process of development, certain sections of illiterate and unskilled individuals resorted to the job of rag picking. This specific job has existed since ancient society but drastically took a speedy expansion after the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards and the name was equivalent to various meanings such as waste pickers and scavengers (Kumari and Kiran 2021, 178). In Aizawl, no proper written document is available with the origin of rag picking but the ragpickers from Tuirial Airfield locality typically stated that they have engaged in this job after their migration into this locality. The workers chose this job as they had no other skills and education degree to progress in other fields, leaving them no other option. Since the poor do not usually engage in formal economy in urban areas, the ragpickers often work in terrible conditions, exposed

to the scorching sun and pouring rain without any protective gear (Barrientos and Hulme 2010, 52). They search through dirty waste heaps, risking their health and safety for a small income. The lack of proper sanitation facilities makes their situation even worse.

‘I have worked in the field of waste picking for approximately four years. I have chosen this line of work due to a physical limitation affecting my leg and hand, which prevents me from standing for prolonged periods. This restricts my options for alternative employment. Since starting this job, my health has declined, particularly concerning my eyes. I have experienced a persistent burning sensation, resulting in frequent tears. This discomfort has significantly impacted my daily life, making it difficult to gain weight and causing trouble sleeping. These challenges underscore the significant toll my occupation has taken on my overall well-being. However, my job has given me a sense of identity and serves as a daily reminder of the social strata to which I belong’ (Female, 47 years old).

In the waste management system of Aizawl, a group of unsung heroes operates largely out of sight and without much recognition. These individuals, undeterred by the harsh conditions of the streets and dumpsites, diligently sift through waste each day to extract recyclable materials. Despite the crucial role played by them in environmental conservation, their tireless work is fraught with numerous, often overlooked challenges. The nature of their work and association with their own fellow workers gave them a sense of social identity (Deaux 1993, 4-12; Mcleod 2023). Social interaction with people outside their circle is scarce and are in a condition termed by Sumner (1906) as ‘in-group’ phenomena. Their identity is often associated with dirt and filth and are largely ignored and shunned shut by the rest of society. They are segregated from the city area and are indulged in their own world, offering no scope of interaction with ‘out-group’ (Sumner 1906, 12-13). Claiming membership in society is difficult for them due to the nature of their work and the negative perceptions associated with their job which led to the formation of ‘meaning’ associated with their identity (Blumer 1969, 5).

### **Symbolic interactionism and the issues of ragpickers**

The ‘meaning’ of their identity is generated through symbolic interactionism which focuses on how society interprets the identity of the ragpickers based on their observed phenomena. Symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals and groups interact and interpret symbols and meanings in their social world. The social stigma directed towards the ragpickers is reinforced through daily interactions and societal

perceptions (Blumer 1969, 2). Ragpickers play a vital role in waste management, yet their contributions are undervalued, resulting in inadequate pay. Their earnings are minimal, just enough for basic survival. This marginalised group is frequently exploited by middlemen, who took advantages of their precarious situations to provide them with unfair wages. In cities like Aizawl, these people work quietly among the isolated streets. Beneath the surface of this critical service are numerous health challenges that ragpickers face everyday. The significance of their work, along with the difficulties they endure, often goes unnoticed and ignored by those outside the informal labour sector. The formation of identity through symbolic interactionism pave way for the concept coined by Becker (1963, 7) as 'labelling' the ragpickers. Society often stereotypes ragpickers with derogatory terms, portraying them as 'dirty' or 'untouchable'. This stigmatisation fuels their social isolation. According to labelling theory, such societal labels significantly affect a person's self-identity and social interactions, creating a cycle of stigma and marginalization. Their role in maintaining clean cities is overshadowed by the filth and negative labels assigned to them. People avoid regular contact with them and are labelled as someone who are not worth interacting with.

‘At the age of 61, I find myself working as a rag picker in Aizawl, Mizoram. This isn't the path I had envisioned for myself, but circumstances have led me here. My primary motivation is to provide for my children. Each day presents me with the harsh realities of this job: enduring the relentless heat of the sun and braving heavy rain. What's even more challenging is navigating through a landscape filled with dangers – from broken glass to sharp blades and even discarded syringes. The physical toll is undeniable, but what truly burdens my heart is the label attached to my occupation. In a society quick to judge, my worth is often diminished because of the nature of my work. However, I persevere, fuelled by a mother's love and the responsibility to ensure my family has enough to eat. It's a harsh reality to face, but for the sake of my family's well-being, I embrace my fate with a heavy heart amidst society's negative perceptions and labels’ (Male, 61 years old).

Daily encounters reinforce negative perceptions of ragpickers, branding them with derogatory terms and deeming them untouchable or filthy. These societal labels deepen their isolation, perpetuating a cycle of stigma and marginalization, as explained by labelling theory, which elucidates how such societal constructs shape self-identity and interpersonal dynamics. The combination of these discriminations and stereotypes, which are attached to a label directed towards the ragpickers are termed by sociologists as stigma (Link and Phelan 2003, 363).

## **The prevalence of stigma**

The ragpickers are one of the most marginalised sections of communities and their struggles with daily life challenges are often associated with stigma (Gautam and Bhadra 2023, 75-90). This issue of stigma led them to be 'disqualified from full social acceptance' (Fitzpatrick 2008, 294; Goffman 1963, 2-3). In urban settings, the issue of stigma mainly affected the ragpickers or the 'urban unrepentant poor' (Goffman 1963, 2-3), who are mainly a category of lower-class group who bear the mark of their status in their work and appearances. This mark of status has led them to be labelled as 'second class citizens' as against the rest of society (Fitzpatrick 2008, 294).

Their job is categorized as an informal sector and they have no proper security with regard to their job (Kumari and Kiran 2021). They are often humiliated and their rights are being violated from time to time. They are stigmatised to be dirty and people do not even want them to enter their houses. Their contributions to a cleaner city and the positive impact of their jobs are highly unrecognized (Naaz 2013, 804). This in turn prohibit them from enjoying full social, economic and political life in society which further brewed poverty. It led them to be isolated and faced discrimination as well (Baah et al. 2018). Since the job of rag picking requires minimum skills, capital investments and prior knowledge of the job, it is regarded as a convenient choice of job for the urban poor people but lacks government sanctioned needs and necessities, backed by certain stigma attached to it (Bhadra 2021, 221).

Since they are working daily on a polluted and unhealthy environment, they are usually stigmatised and perceived to have detrimental ill health. Engaging in rag picking, sifting through waste materials to find items for recycling or re-sale exposes individuals to numerous health hazards. This activity significantly impacts both the physical and mental well-being of those involved. Ragpickers often encounter hazardous materials and work under dangerous conditions, heightening their risk of injury and illness. Health concerns for ragpickers are primarily driven by their frequent exposure to harmful substances. While sorting through waste, they come into direct contact with sharp objects and toxic chemicals, which increases their susceptibility to cuts, infections, and other injuries. Moreover, continuous exposure to pollutants like heavy metals and pesticides can lead to long term health issues, such as respiratory problems, skin disorders, and chronic illnesses. The cumulative effect of these exposures can severely affect their overall health and quality of life. Beyond the tangible health hazards, the socio-economic context in which ragpickers operate exacerbates their vulnerability. Many are marginalised individuals from low-income backgrounds, facing limited access to healthcare, education, and social support systems. The lack of formal employment



opportunities pushes them into precarious work conditions, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exploitation. They are even tasked with handling hazardous wastes and bio-medical wastes from people all over the city such as used syringes and needles, used bandages and expired medicines. Handling such wastes causes respiratory and other lethal health conditions for them (Kumari and Kiran 2022). This further increased the volume of stigma against them as people feared they will cause an outbreak of diseases in society upon regular interaction with them. Majority of their workplaces, which are the waste sites are infested with germs and are also breeding grounds for germs. The rag pickers normally do not use gloves in Mizoram and the rotten garbage and germ-infested wastes are usually handled with their bare hands. They are not educated on the importance of using gloves to avoid the fleas and germ-rich wastes in these sites (Chandramohan et al. 2009).

‘I do not feel like using gloves. Even though some people would donate gloves to us occasionally, most of us did not feel the need to use them. I personally felt that gloves hinder my work, and I cannot work properly if I use them. So, based on my experiences, it is better to work and collect waste without using gloves. Not using gloves and other protective gear at our work site disgusts people and they even think we are a ‘walking germ factory.’ This further expands the issue of stigmatisation around us, which makes people avoid contact with us’ (Male, 52 years old).

Ragpickers are often ostracized and marginalised, treated as outcasts in society. This not only affects their self-esteem but also hampers their integration into mainstream society, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Furthermore, the stigma associated with their occupation adds another layer of complexity to their plight. They often endure social exclusion, further marginalizing them from mainstream society and hindering their access to essential services and resources.

‘I’ve been employed as a ragpicker for the past three years, a decision I made reluctantly due to my family’s financial struggles and the untimely death of my husband. However, this occupation has subjected me to significant discrimination and social stigma, primarily because of my age and the nature of the work. The disdainful looks and judgmental attitudes from members of society have deeply wounded me. Despite these challenges, quitting my job isn’t a feasible option, as it serves as a lifeline for my family’s financial stability. The thought of the happiness and well-being it brings to my children keeps me going, despite the hardships and societal prejudices I face’ (Female, 39 years old).

The stigma they face is rooted in these structural inequalities and the broader social attitudes that devalue manual and low-paid labour. Besides the issue of stigma, one of the most overlooked conditions associated with ragpickers is their health implications which can be sociologically analysed and interpreted.

### **Analysis through sociology of health and illness**

In addressing the health implications faced by ragpickers, a comprehensive approach should be adopted to help these workers in tackling the unfairness and obstacles that they encounter. Key components of this strategy include improving their working conditions and ensuring they have access to healthcare. Moreover, empowering ragpickers through education, skill-building initiatives, and social welfare programs is essential. Incorporating ragpickers into formal waste management systems and acknowledging their role in sustainable development can significantly improve their social status and economic stability. Promoting inclusivity and social justice is crucial to creating a society that values and safeguards the health and well-being of all its members. Despite their significant contributions, ragpickers often encounter numerous challenges, such as health hazards, a lack of recognition, and insufficient access to basic services. Examining the specific experiences and initiatives related to ragpickers in Aizawl can provide valuable insights into their unique circumstances and help identify solutions that are tailored to their needs within the city. Sociology deals with the scientific study of the various social relations and institutions which include the issues related to ragpickers in terms of their health (Smelser 1994, 275). The ragpickers in Aizawl faced numerous problems with regard to their health. The health issues often remain untreated largely due to their lack of money for hospital visits and also partly because of ignorance. This health issue threatens the survival and proper flow of their community. All these are part of social problems which damage the society including its members and is perceived to be 'socially remediable' (Weber 1995, 9). The job of rag picking adversely affected the workers as many workers in the field have asthma, breathing troubles, constant coughing and eyesight problems. The workers do not visit hospitals for treatment as they felt that they cannot afford treatment.

‘Both my wife and I work as ragpickers to support our family. We lack formal education and have few alternatives to make ends meet besides rag picking. During our work, we collect heavy metals and aluminium to sell, often encountering sharp objects along the way. Unfortunately, the environmental conditions in our area have worsened over the past five years, exposing us to harmful pollutants, particularly from ongoing burning activities. This has led to respiratory issues

for my wife, making it difficult for her to breathe. Despite her health problems, we have no choice but to continue working, as our family relies on this income for survival' (Male, 42 years old).

The workers barely managed to make ends meet, so leaving work for even one day to visit the hospital is out of the question for them. The stigma and the health hazards issues associated with the nature of their job limited the scope and relevance for coping with urban poor as it became increasingly difficult to adapt to their existing state of poverty (Clark 2012, 139).

'For the past five years, I've been working as a waste picker out of necessity to support my family financially. Unfortunately, this job carries a significant social stigma, with people often looking down on us simply because of the work we do. It's deeply hurtful and, at times, makes me contemplate quitting. However, due to my lack of education and my financially disadvantaged background, I feel trapped in this line of work. I have had respiratory issues over the years and have trouble breathing, but I cannot afford to go for medical check-ups because I can't afford to miss even one day's income. Despite the emotional toll and health effect it takes, the sole reason I continue in this job is to provide for my family' (Male, 34 years old).

The idea of social patterning, as indicated by Amzat and Razum (2014) stated that all the stigma, labelling, discrimination and negative perceptions attributed towards the ragpickers could be the determinants of their health status. In an urban area, people with the poorest living conditions like the ragpickers experienced increased unfavourable environment and negative social factors which in turn contributed to the onset of various diseases and illness among the ragpickers in the city (Ahmad et al. 2023, 259). In modern days, the decline in health and illness of a person is intertwined with poverty and thus provide a vicious endless cycle (Karvonen et al. 2018).

### **Coping with urban poverty**

It becomes extensively difficult for the ragpickers to cope with urban poverty by living with detrimental health conditions. Ill health and poverty are closely link to one another and there is higher risk of poorer health among the ragpickers which further increases lower productivity. This, in turn, leads to an extreme poverty. Besides, the stigma, discrimination and negative perceptions directed towards them only contributed to their low standards of living. As they do not have any other skills or knowledge to find other jobs, they are stuck with the work of rag picking even amidst the invisible treatment given by society (Shiraishi et al. 2009, 115-116). The importance of institutional strengths which stem from the deeply held

moral values of society should not be ignored in the ways of coping with urban poverty for them. Mere donation of money to them does not end poverty but only alleviate it for a temporary period (Godfrey 2014, 53). Hence, social support plays an important role for the ragpickers in coping with poverty as through the prevalence of social support, stigma and all other negative perceptions are kept at bay. The government also discussed ways to improve waste management systems through it so that the health and well-being of the urban poor are given high priority which will in turn, increased the capabilities of the ragpickers to work more and earn more to counter their daily poor living (Silva et al. 2019).

### **Conclusion**

The experiences of ragpickers highlight the severe social stigma and numerous health problems linked to their occupation. These individuals encounter significant physical challenges, such as respiratory issues, eye problems, and injuries from hazardous materials. Furthermore, societal attitudes towards waste pickers are largely negative, resulting in social isolation and emotional distress. Despite these difficulties, the need to provide for their families left them with little choice but to continue in this work. These accounts emphasise the urgent need for improved working conditions, better healthcare access, and societal changes to address the stigma and health risks faced by ragpickers. Despite these myriad challenges, ragpickers continue to persevere, driven by necessity and resilience. Their valuable contribution to waste management deserves recognition and support from policymakers, communities, and society at large. Efforts should be made to improve their working conditions, provide access to education and healthcare, and empower them with legal protections and social security benefits. Only through collective action and advocacy, can the plight of ragpickers be alleviated and ensure their dignity and well-being. These experiences underscore the urgent need for several critical changes. Improving working conditions and healthcare access is paramount. The health implications of rag picking underscore the urgent need for comprehensive intervention strategies that address the multifaceted challenges faced by workers in the informal sector. Moreover, societal attitudes must shift to reduce stigma and support the health and well-being of ragpickers. Despite their struggles, ragpickers display remarkable resilience and perseverance. Their contributions to waste management are valuable and deserves recognition and support. Policy makers, communities, and society must work together to enhance their working conditions, provide education and healthcare, and offer legal protections and social security benefits. Through collective action and solidarity, the ragpickers can enjoy the right to health and dignity to counter urban poverty.

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## **Rapid Unsustainable Transition from Rural to Urban: A Study on the Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands and its Effects on the Socio-Ecological Setup of the Area**

**Arpita Chaudhury Aich**

### **Abstract**

*Wetlands are considered as a natural resource to an area. They are considered as the natural kidneys of ecosystem. The natural balance of the ecosystem is maintained and preserved both by both Geographically Isolated Wetlands (GIWs) and Wetlands of International Importance, as designated by Ramsar Sites. The wetlands are currently the most endangered since they are encircled by upland areas, human land use practices, and rapid infilling for the development of infrastructure. Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands is a Geographically Isolated Wetlands with an enormous ecological significance. Due to recent spike in infrastructural development relating to unsustainable urbanization in the area, the wetlands in these areas are getting in filled. The paper aims to identify the ecological services offered by the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands and aims to analyse the shift from rural to urban expansion, spike in increased density of urban population in the area and its effect on the study area which has been infilled to cater the burgeoning urban growth in the area. For ascertaining the objectives, in-depth interviews of around 250 stakeholders were taken to identify the ecological services offered by the wetlands and Rapid Assessment of the Wetland ecosystem services was probed to understand the importance of the wetlands in the light of offering ecological services. Water resources data of the study area was analysed using satellite imageries, to ascertain the impacts of infilling of the wetlands in the ecological well-being of the area. The infilling of these wetlands is resulting in waterlogging and flood like situation in the area, as well as putting huge pressure on the water resources of the area. The ecosystem is severely getting affected with the extensive floral and faunal destruction. Thus, the entire ecology of the area is undergoing huge stress like condition.*

**Keywords:** Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands, Unsustainable Urbanization Wetlands infilling, Ecosystem Services Index, Water resources



## Introduction:

The ecosystem of the planet is kept in balance by wetlands. The natural balance of the ecosystem is maintained and preserved both by both Geographically Isolated Wetlands (GIWs) and Wetlands of International Importance, as designated by Ramsar Sites. Among the main tasks that wetlands perform are storm surge reduction, run-off control, and nutrient regulation (**Basu, T., Das, A.,2021**). Apart from the Wetlands designated by Ramsar convention, 1971, there are local wetlands which plays an important role in balancing and maintaining the local environment and ecological setup of a localized area. These wetlands are also termed as “Geographically isolated wetlands”. Geographically Isolated Wetlands (GIWs), are wetlands that are not connected to any permanent rivers, streams, seas, or oceans or through constant flowing surface water. The majority of the meadows surrounding them are dry (**Bolca, M., 2006**). These wetlands were formed as a result of variations in the regional terrain, slope, hydrology, and climate. Due to changes in river flow, wetlands situated on former flood plains that were once flooded by sporadic rivers have been left isolated.

Cities have historically been formed and developed in a significant manner due to their closeness to water bodies; however, modern urban planning ignores the connection between urban development and water bodies, floodplains, and catchment areas. Consequently, adjacent rural and peripheral areas are being transformed into real estate development, allowing Indian cities to grow but also significantly changing the environmental and biophysical circumstances. Since the 1990s, capital-intensive measures have played a major role in driving India's urbanization. Urban wetlands are a main victim of capital's takeover of resources with unclear ownership status in Indian cities, which is heightened by such actions.

Urbanization in the Ramsar Convention of 1971 has been recognized as a major hazard to the management and conservation of wetlands in urban areas. These wetlands are currently the most endangered since they are encircled by upland areas, human land use practices, and rapid infilling for the development of infrastructure. Wetlands are biogeochemical hotspots (**Chakravarthy, K.,**

**Charters, F., Cochrane, T. 2019**); nevertheless, because of their geographic isolation, Geographically Isolated Wetlands have very few legal protections. West Bengal is abounded with Geographically isolated wetlands namely Berunanpukuria, Barotirir Beel, and Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands and many more.

Konnagar hindmotor wetlands is a Geographically Isolated Wetlands with an enormous ecological significance. The wetlands comprise a portion of the Hooghly River's ancient deltaic plain. The wetland offers numerous environmental services, like as storm water passage, biodiversity maintenance, and the creation of livelihood. However, because of spike in infrastructural development relating to unsustainable urbanization in the area, these wetlands are getting infilled. To cater the housing needs of the rapidly increasing urban population, there has been a spike in the real estate projects surrounding the study area. One of the most notable real estate project in the area is being developed by Sriram group and has been named as Sriram hi-tech city. The real estate project will be providing urban homes to the urbanities at the cost of infilling 278.48 acres of wetlands namely the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands. The 278.48 acres of the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands which served as home to numerous species and a source of livelihood to thousand is getting infilled to transform into jungles of concrete.

The importance of the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands are as follows:

- Supplying the suburbs of Sreerampore, Uttarpara, Konnagar-Hindmotor, Rishra with the necessary and fresh amount of fish, vegetables, and fruits (**Chakraborty, P., et al., 2015**);
- Carbon sequestration as well as absorbing pollutants from the industrial belt of Hooghly thereby cleaning the air.
- Providing a home for a diversity of flora and fauna as well as living organisms endemic to wetlands
- Stormwater and flood management through stormwater passage and sewage water passage of the water falling into the Konnagar Hindmotor wetlands from the surrounding municipalities namely Rishra, Bhadreswar, Champdani, Baidyabati respectively.
- Preserving the region's microclimate

- Preserving the delicate biological balance in an environment and ecosystem
- Generation of livelihood opportunities through fishing, harvesting of fruits.

Thus, GIWs are often referred to as "Depressional wetlands" or riparian floodplains which are present on active flood plains. These depressional wetlands are located in the rich riparian floodplain of the Hooghly river basin. Konnagar Hindmotor wetlands is one the finest example of the riparian or depressional floodplain.

#### Location of the Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands

The Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands are situated in the Hooghly district's Sreerampore subdivision. The locational or the geographical coordinates are 23 degrees 01 minutes 20 seconds North to 22degrees 39 minutes 32 seconds North, 88 degrees 30 minutes 15 seconds East to 87 degrees 30minutes 20 seconds East.

#### Evolution of the Konnagar- Hindmotor wetlands and its Historical Background

The study area Konnagar-Hindmotor is situated in the Hooghly district. "Hooghly" comes from the word "*Hogla*", which is a tall reed like grass and grows in abundance on the river banks and in the marshy lowlands.(O Malley, **Bengal District Gazetteers, Hooghly, 1912**)

The tract between river Hooghly and river Damodar is divided into two physiographic divisions namely:

- A. High riparian strips of land along the river
- B. Saucer shaped depressions

The land between river Hooghly and river Damodar is almost a flat alluvial plain with sluggish streams and have many saucers shaped depressions which forms massive creeks and marshes. During the seventeenth century, the area of Kotrung and Konnagar was referred as Allinagar

These depressions receive the drainage of the surrounding lands and during the wet period and these creeks and marshes drain their contents out into the rivers through smaller streams.

This type of marshy depressions is numerous found in the Sreemrampore Subdivision i.e. between the Hooghly and paleo-river Saraswati interflaves. These creeks or wetlands are found in continuous stretch between from Hooghly Saraswati to Saraswati Kaushiki and Kana Damodar and these marshes are drained by small rivulets .

### **Objectives**

- To identify the ecological services offered by the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands.
- To analyse the shift from rural to urban expansion, spike in increased density of urban population in the area and its effect on the study area which has been infilled to cater the burgeoning urban growth in the area.

### **Methodology**

Primary Data: In-depth interviews of around 250 stakeholders were taken to identify the ecological services offered by the wetlands and Rapid Assessment of the Wetland ecosystem services was probed to understand the importance of the wetlands in the light of offering ecological services

Secondary Data: Census data of population was collected for the years 1991-2001-2011 respectively to get an insight about the growth of urban population in the study area.

Change in the density of population in the three decades has been calculated, Satellite images were analyzed of the years 1990-2003-2014 respectively on the parameters of increase in urban extent and total composition of built up area added. Satellite imageries were analysed and In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the effect of the illegal infilling of the wetlands on the ecology of the area.

### **Results and Discussion**

Around 250 stakeholders of the wetlands were rigorously interviewed to ascertain the importance of the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands in-terms of offering ecological services. Based on the response, the ecological services offered by the wetlands were ranked in ascending to descending order according to the importance. It was found that these wetlands offer a plethora of ecological benefits and services to the people.

The services offered by the wetlands were categorized into mainly the following types:

- Provisioning services,
- Regulating services,
- Supporting services and
- Cultural services.

Provisioning services are defined as the capacity of humans to obtain resources from ecosystems, including wood, oil, food, genetic resources, and medicines, in addition to products like food and water.

Regulating services refers to the services derived from the normal processes and operations of ecosystems, such as pollination, water purification, flood control, and other natural hazard control.

Supporting services refers to the services which have an impact on survival since they are related to the habitat's ability to function in Ecosystems. For instance, photosynthesis, the water cycle, and the nutrient cycle, all of which enable humans to survive.

Cultural services refer to the non-material benefits that humans receive from ecosystems are included in cultural services. These include leisure, artistic ideals, and spiritual enrichment.

Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands offers a total of 17 ecosystem services. 8 out of 17 ecological services (47.05 percent) are directly benefitting the receivers of the wetland., 9 out of 17 ecological services (52.9 percent) are in-directly benefitting the receivers of the wetland.

29.4 percent of the total ecological services are provisional services offered by the wetland. 11.76 percent of the ecological services offered from these wetlands are of regulating services in nature. 41.17 percent of the total services are supporting services by nature. 17.64 percent of the total services are cultural in nature.

Provisioning services have an immense benefits in the economic life of the stakeholders of the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands. The direct stakeholders used the services of wetlands for fish, fodder, medicinal herbs mainly water caltrop, *thankuni* leaves.

The direct stakeholders have revealed a greater degree of extraction and utilisation of wetland resources compared to their urban counterparts.

Gugli, a species of small edible snail, is also collected for selling in the market. Fishes were harnessed from these wetlands namely *koi*, *magur*, *tilapia*.

Water from these wetlands is also used for irrigating the agricultural fields surrounding the wetlands namely Bosipota, Tentulpota areas.

11.76 percent of the ecological services offered from these wetlands are of regulating services in nature. These wetlands help to combat frequent floods by retaining a huge amount of excess water during the monsoon as well as recharge groundwater throughout the year

41.17 percent of the total services are supporting services by nature, whereas 17.64% of the total services are cultural in nature.

Ecological Services Index (ESI) was calculated and the value from the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands is 0.647. Value of Ecological Services Index ranges from +1.0 to -1.0., where +1.0 means that the wetland is providing a high level of benefits to society; conversely, an ESI of -1.0 means that a wetland is providing a high level of dis-benefit. ESI value for Konnagar-Hindmotor area signifies wetland is providing a moderate level of benefits to the society.

Despite offering ecological benefits to the stakeholders, the Konnagar Hindmotor is being infilled by land sharks and forcing the stakeholders to change in their livelihood. The fruit growers, fishermen, and people who gather medicinal plants have all changed their sources of income. Merely 2% of the parties involved rely on this marshy wetland for their livelihood.

By analyzing the census data of last three decades that is from 1991 to 2011, it has been found that the areas of Uttarpara, Kotrung, Konnagar, Hindmotor is severely facing a population explosion in terms of urban growth and expansion. The Uttarpara Kotrung area which encompasses an area of 16.32 square kilometers of area, have witnessed a growth of population from 101,268 persons in 1991 to 159,147 persons in 2011. The density of population per square kilometer of the area has drastically increased from 6197 persons per square kilometer to 9,740

persons per square kilometer. Similarly, Konnagar-Hindmotor area has also witnessed a similar wave of population increment. Konnagar Hindmotor encompasses a total area of 4.42 square kilometer, with a total population of 62,200 persons in 1991, it has increased to 76,172 persons in 2011. The density of persons per square kilometer has increased from 14,072 persons per square kilometer in 1991 to 17,233 persons per square kilometer in 2011. There has been a transformation from rural setup to urban expansion in the area. The rural population in 2001 was 51,699 persons and it declined to 36,389 persons in 2011. There was a total decline of 15,310 rural persons between 2001 and 2011. On the other hand, the urban population in the same area increased to 115877 persons in 2011 from 74661 persons in 2001. There has a total increment of 41,216 persons in the urban population. Percentage increase in urban growth Per square kilometer was calculated from the Urban Growth Monitoring system of National Remote Sensing Centre for the areas and it was found that in the year 1991, increase in urban growth Per square kilometer was only 1.53 percent per square kilometers, while in the year 2011 urban growth per square kilometer has drastically increased to 17.37 per square kilometer. The statistics clearly proves the advent of severe urban expansion surrounding the study area.

The impacts of infilling of the 278.48 acres of Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands are creating a serious disruption in the stormwater passage from the areas of Rishra, Sreerampore, Baidyabati areas. After receiving the stormwater and sewage water from the above-mentioned areas, the wetlands used to finally transfer the waters in to the greater Dankuni wetlands, thereby preventing the areas from the flooding and waterlogging.

Due to the unsustainable development in the area owing to urban expansion, the area is facing problems of waterlogging over the years, decline in groundwater level. The increase in urban population over a small area of land, have resulted in extreme pressure over the water resources of the area. The groundwater level in the study area have declined and stands at semi critical level in the year 2022 from safe level in 2017 as per the reports from the central Ground water Board. By analyzing the Satellite imagery from World Resources Institute Aqueduct, it has been found that Water depletion rate is at very high level in the area, and water demand is going to increase atleast by 1.4 times owing to the unsustainable way of urban expansion. The water depletion rate in the

area is mainly attributed to the sudden spike in the density of population in the Sri-ram Hitech city which has been created by infilling of the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands. The population density in the adjoining areas of the wetlands was only 95,222 persons per square kilometer in 2011 which has shoot to 172,837 persons per square kilometer in the present scenario. The infilling of the wetlands by heaps of concrete will eventually lead to increase in the water stress by 1.4 times of the present situation in 2040. The planned hi-tech city and the surrounding urban areas is under severe threat of water risk. The sightings of avi-fauna has severely dwindled in the Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands, and several endangered species like little Grebe, Taiga flycatcher, Bava weaver birds have simply changed their path owing to constant human disturbance and transformation of the wetlands into jungles of concrete. There has been a severe human conflict with the Bengal Fishing Cat, Civet, Monoclad Cobras and Russels Viper.

### **Conclusion**

From the intensive study of the aspects of Konnagar-Hindmotor wetlands and its effects on the ecological well being of the area, the following threats have been determined. The primary risks associated with the wetlands are

- The construction of housing complexes is gradually turning marshes into concrete jungles.
- Obstruction in the storm water channel that transports the combined flow to the Dankuni wetlands from the Chapdani Bhadreswar Municipality.
- Pressure on the region's water resources due to an increase in demand for surface and groundwater as a result of housing project construction.
- Loss of the area's biodiversity in terms of plants and animals as a result of the wetlands' infilling for the planned township.
- One of the main issues with good wetland management and conservation is the lack of cooperation and understanding among stakeholders regarding the essential ecosystem functions of the wetlands.



Thus, by evaluating the threats towards these wetlands, sustainable management of the wetlands is the need of the hour. Sustainable management of wetlands refers to managing the water and the ecological services of the wetlands for a better condition. It means adoption of a comprehensive policy so there is a greater protection of the wetlands and the stakeholders take the entire opportunity to protect the wetlands. Sustainable management of wetlands encompasses such comprehensive measures, which not only maintains the balance between ecosystem and the socio-economic activities centred around the wetlands.

In order to support emerging ideas like sponge cities, blue green infrastructure—which recommends the presence of water-bodies, including wetlands, for absorbing stormwater runoff. Green infrastructure is the need of the hour where urban development is in line with the principles of conserving natural resources like waterbodies and green cover in cities. To overcome the threats to the wetlands and for proper conservation and management of the Konnagar-Hindmotor Wetlands, Community Participation i.e. Wetland Participatory management is the need of the hour thereby involving local citizens including direct and indirect stakeholders, for wetlands management through awareness and engagement programs to impart a sense of responsibility and purpose among the people towards conserving and protecting wetlands.

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## **Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Significance of Sacred Grove and Ecology of Santal of Jharkhand**

**Dolly Florence**

### **Introduction**

Ecology in the broadest sense is a way of looking at plants and should never be divorced from the study of their structure development and function. It is appropriate to consider the relative importance of various characteristics shown by the plants from the ecological point of view and regarding their condition of existence in the field therefore, plants should not only be looked at as a part of ecology but also as cultural objects that carry lots of meaning for the people who are surrounded by the plant world. To find out the different meanings people associate with plants I have taken up my research work to understand traditional plant use and management among Santal of Jharkhand which is an indigenous perception of the natural world, meaning thereby how specific plants are regarded as sacred and how social control determines rights of access to certain areas of land. All this accessibility to the plant world influences how community members behave towards the resources within their environment. Similarly, if a disease is believed to be of spiritual origin rather than natural origin in such cases the remedies which is sought after are more of symbolic significance than the pharmacological activity. The present research humbly attempts to understand how Santals perceive their plant world. What is the significance of sacred groves in their culture and what effort is made to preserve the biodiversity to achieve sustainable goals? Therefore, this research paper outlines the major factors that can influence an individual's cognition of the natural world and discusses how their perception can be examined.

Ecology can be understood as an association of knowledge between people and nature and their vital existence for the production of food, sustaining clean air and water, and nurturing biodiversity in a changing climate. At present it is observed that India is flourishing in different

forms of nature worship. Different species of lifeforms are found to exist and are worshipped with veneration. There are particular pockets of land which are protected by the tribal and indigenous communities around their vicinity to create a balance in ecological health. It is known as sacred grooves. In Santal sacred grooves Sal tree is very commonly found to exist and it is worshipped. There are a variety of plant species creeper climbers are also found to exist which are of great medicinal value. These plant species are protected by the indigenous people with their religious beliefs and practices and community people with their immense medical knowledge try to preserve valuable plant species which are about to extinction. Removing plants from the sacred groove is considered taboo. This preservation of the entire vegetation in association with a deity is quite a distinct phenomenon from the preservation of isolated specimens of sacred tree species such as the Peepal tree i.e. *Ficus religiosa* which are often preserved and worshipped even without any association with a deity (Gadgil et al., 1976:152-160). It is a very distinct feature of the Santal sacred grove where the Sal tree and Mahua tree are often preserved and worshipped. This article is an outcome of my research study with the Santal when I visited the village Inderbani in Dumka district to observe and understand the existence and significance of the Sacred Groves. By and large sacred groves are surrounded by some of the popular species of plant like Sal tree, Mahua tree, Peepal tree, and many other plant species which have medicinal properties. I have observed that the Santal people never enter the sacred groove without a bath as it is believed to be a holy place of worship. The plant species which are found to exist in the sacred grove are mainly found in a circle or rectangular shape. The sacred grove is an adobe of ancestral spirits who are worshipped from time to time to seek the blessings of protection from unnatural calamities and pandemics. Rituals are performed by the priests of the village known as “pahan” but in his absence, the Santal people themselves perform the rituals. Sacred groves are considered benevolent for community activities such as festivals of harvesting like ‘sohrai’, weddings birth rituals, and flower festivals ‘baha porob’. (Chakraborty, 2019:50-52)

### **Bringing upon the Bongas in the sacred grove**

Santal live in the lap of nature. They do not have temples or idols for worship. The hills, lakes, springs and groves are the object of respect and fear for them. According to them, these objects



are abodes of supreme supernatural energy or the departed spirits or 'Bonga' (Dalton 1959:54). Bonga means a spirit. These spirits are not bound by temporal bodies. The ordinary spirit world of the Santal includes the benevolent ancestral spirit as well as the malevolent demons which are appeased out of devotion and fear. Thus, the major element of Santal religion is the belief that they are surrounded by 'Bonga'. There are spirits in the village forest, and even in the mountains. These spirits must be worshipped and appeased to avoid any harm caused by them. The main Bonga that Santal worship is 'Maran Buru' or 'Thakur' (the creator of humanity), 'Sing Bonga' (sun god), 'Jaher -Era' (goddess of the sacred grove), Moreko Turuiko (literally means five males and six females), 'Orak Bonga' (household spirit), 'Abgae Bonga' (village boundary spirit), and lastly the 'Manjhi Haram Bonga' (spirit of the village founder) as recorded by (Biswas 1956:60, Hembrom 1988:45). These Bongas are still worshipped today.

To bring the bongas up in the sacred grove three to four men from the Santal community come forward who are to be possessed. Then village people call out the names by saying together come lords, the five, the lady of the sacred grove the Pargana, Maran Buru, Gosae era, and Manjhi Haram we are calling upon you invoking you. When the four men are possessed, they turn their heads violently around speaking through the mouth of the possessed men the Bonga say 'sahak' (which means alright). Thereupon the village people say please then lord where shall we make a place of worship for ye, make a place to stay? Now the bongas get up and go towards the forest. They find and take along some stones that they have brought with them to the place they put them down as they think well at the foot of the trees. Three in a row beside each other at one place, each stone at the foot of a separate tree, one representing the lady of the grove, they place it under the Sal tree one representing the five and one representing the 'Maran Buru'. One represents the 'Gosae era' they put down the stones at the foot of the 'Mahua Tree' one represents Pargana they put down at the foot of any tree and one represents Manjhi Haram they bring to the village street and put down in the streets outside the house of the village headman. Here they, later on, build a structure 'Manjhi Than' (Bodding, 1998:32). Sacred groves are holy places where religious thinking and deities were imagined by the Indigenous societies to exist through stones, trees, animals and woods and animism appear to the gratefulness and admiration of the environment to provide goods and services among the human society (Berkes, 1999:34). The tribal sacred groves are considered as the absenteeism of

any images of deities. Moreover, “Sacred Groves are social spaces respected by the communities and they play multiple roles. The most significant of these is that of the symbol of self-assertion. Although, among many communities, the sacred groves are mandatorily kept to mark settlement rights” stated by leading Indian anthropologist (Roy Burman, 2003:60). On the other hand, “In India, as well as in many parts of the world, several communities practice different forms of nature worship. One such significant tradition is providing, where protection to patches of forests dedicated to deities and or ancestral spirits. These patches of forests are known as sacred groves. The tradition is very ancient and was once very widespread in most parts of the world. Sacred Grove is a rich heritage among the tribal communities which played a significant role in religious and socio-cultural life among the local tribal people (Malhotra et al, 2001:346-351).

Various cultural festivals are accomplished in the sacred grove for example most important social functions such as various occasions including social gatherings, marriage, after-death rituals and so on. However, in West Bengal, the sacred grove presents with the beliefs of animistic tribal deities and ancestral spirits. It is to be mentioned that in rural parts of Jharkhand sacred grove is also known as Jaherthan (in Santali) but the Santali people usually call it “Jaher Era” (the lady of the grove). Among the Santal society sacred grove has the important function of establishing village membership and geographical boundaries (Troisi, 1978:115). Detailed accounts of socio-cultural functions of the space of sacred groves have been pronounced in some ethnographic studies (Ray 1912:42, Troisi 1978:115, Baské 1993:49).

#### **Some of the valuable medicinal plants in the sacred grove.**

Some of the sacred groves may also have had their origin in more secular causes, in particular for the preservation of a valuable tree or climber which was relatively rare in the locality. One of the valuable species of plants which I would like to mention here is *Plumbago zeylanica* (PZ) commonly called Doctor bush or Ceylon Leadwort is a semi-climbing sub-shrub that grows throughout Asia, Australia, Africa and Ceylon and is widely used in ethnomedicine. (Chopra et al., 1956:100). It is used in the indigenous system of medicine, and is commonly known as “Chitra” and in Santali, it is known as ‘Kitauri’. The roots of *plumbago zeylanica* are

commonly used in the snake bite treatment. This species of plant is generally found in the sacred grove and therefore these species are preserved for various ethnomedicinal purposes. I recall in one of the incidents the medicine men took me to the sacred grove and gave me a piece of the climber *Plumbago zeylanica* and told me in future if I happen to encounter any snake-bitten person I should help them by applying these valuable medicinal plants. In the Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicines, the whole plant has been described as significantly effective against anaemia, rheumatic pain, sprains, dysmenorrhoea, carbuncles, scabies, leprosy, contusion of the extremities, inflammation, ulcers and elimination of intestinal parasites. The roots of the plant and its constituents are credited with potential therapeutic properties including antiatherogenic, cardiogenic, neuroprotective and central nervous system stimulating properties. (Bopaiah, et al, 2001:153–156)

There are also incidents where Santal uses ‘amsan dhiri’ literally means dysentery stones which is an ancient stone bead found buried here and there, believed to act as a charm to keep dysentery away. These beads are of various colors and it is worn as amulet and believed to be a charm against the form of disease. These stones are sometimes found in sacred groves. The plant species *Adina cordifolia* (Roxb) which is known as ‘karam dari’ is considered one of the precious trees generally found in the sacred grove. The bark of this plant is used to treat jaundice by Santal medicine men. This particular ‘karam tree’ has a very significant role in the Santal culture. Lots of folk tales are recorded by various authors about this tree which symbolises the friendship bond. Every friend would gift a branch of this tree to strengthen their friendship bond. Santal religious beliefs and seasonal festivals are organised to ensure safety and prosperity at the community level from their ‘Bonga’ spiritual god of Santal. Therefore, all their festivals consist of communal worship.

Baha, the flower festival of Santal is celebrated between February and March every year – the phagun month as per Hindu Calendar. It is a celebration to express gratitude and respect for Mother Nature. Baha is one of the biggest festivals of Santals after Sohrai – the harvest festival. This festival marks the turn of the year. The Sal tree blossoms at this time everywhere in the sacred grove. The commencement of the festival creates the vibes of a strong bond and sense of oneness by the people of the entire family and villagers. Baha means flower. It symbolizes the blooming flowers of the nearby sacred grove which includes trees like Sal (*Shorea robusta*),

Mahua (*Bassia latifolia*) and all the varieties of flowering plants and trees. The bright colour flower conveys the message of happiness, joy, excitement, progress, growth, union etc. Baha festival is celebrated when Sal trees get new flowers on their branches. It is a worship of the village deity who is considered to be the protector of the tribes. People sing and dance a lot when the new flowers appear. During the Baha festival people offer the first fruits of '*Bassia latifolia*' and the flowers of Sal '*Shorea robusta*' and other wild fruits to their bonga. They believe that all fresh crops, fruits, and flowers are provided to them by their bonga. Therefore, it is their prime responsibility to serve the Bonga with fresh offerings. The Santal worship is mainly a congregational form. There is no concept of an individual approach to the Bonga but fellowship is maintained through sacrifices and offerings (Troisi 1975;115). I have also come across incidents where each family brings their offerings in the form of gifts to the Bonga in Sal grove where the mother goddess 'jaherera' resides. She possesses a unique characteristic of bearing or producing food crops. She is also known as the grand old lady of the grove. Therefore, the Baha festival is not only celebrated at the communal level but also at the family level. Among Santal, the celebration of festivals is a collective effort and it reflects their cultural tradition. Until Baha festival takes place no Santhal will gather the 'mahua' blossom which provide them with both food and drink. During 'Baha' festival Santal seems to forget all worries, stress and strains of day-to-day life. On this occasion, people visit their relatives and friends and they offer gifts to each other. The significance of this festival deals with the massive proposition of Bonga i.e. the benevolent spirits who are asked to keep the village free from sickness and diseases and to protect their crops and cattle from all kinds of natural calamities. Santhal also considers the Baha festival as a feast of fertility.

### **The cultural aspect of looking at the plants during the Baha festival**

Santal are mindful people and they always try to protect their environment. For them, plants are highly valued. Plants are the important place adobe for their bonga (spirits) who are meant to protect their society from all kinds of sickness, witchcraft and natural calamities. One of the important functions of the Sacred Groove (Jaherthan) is a place where (Jaherera) female

goddesses of Santal reside. Mostly, Sacred Groove produces a good number of medicinal plants and trees to serve as a remedy for various diseases. The bark of the Sal (*Sohrea robusta*) can be used to treat acidity, diarrhoea, and dysentery because of its astringent properties. It has been found that the twigs of the Sal and Mahua trees are used as toothbrushes by the Santal community. It is very useful to treat tooth-related problems such as bleeding of gum tooth decay and halitosis. The same is the case with the Mahua tree which also produces an enormous amount of valuable medicinal products. Apart from this, these trees also produce valuable bark, twigs, fruits etc. which are sold at the market for economic generation. Mahua flower is used to make local beer also known as 'handi' and is a savour during festive times. One of the important significations of the Baha festival is that people pay great respect for their surrounding trees and plants which have medicinal properties. Secondly only after the Baha festival is over do people go to the daily market to sell fresh food crops thus; we can observe economic function being fulfilled. The Baha dance reflects a story of bravery about their group members who go hunting on the third day of the Baha festival and it also communicates a strong sense of social group bonding. People sense the feeling of happiness and togetherness and they establish solidarity among fellow mates. They are always united to fight against any circumstances and this quality makes them a good human being. The Baha festival also reflects the concept of sustainability where Santal people try to plant the saplings of 'Sal' and 'Mahua' in their groove thus maintaining a balance in our environment. The Baha festival strongly depicts a strong sense of unity among group members which holds the group together just by the virtue of unity group members feel a sense of loyalty and sympathy towards each other. The Baha festival helps to foster the members of the group to collectively defend the interest of the group and work towards the collective welfare of the entire Santal community.

Baha festival is often accompanied by Santali group dance which is a reflection of their culture. The gender roles, among Santal during dance pattern is very unique to their culture. Both men and women find delight in singing and dancing together and are very expressive in communicating their emotions. The Baha dance reflects the story of the bravery of their group members and it also conveys a strong sense of social group bonding. I have witnessed the drums' sounds, the melody of the singing, and the lullaby of the Baha dance must be echoed incessantly throughout the village.

## Conclusion

Biodiversity and its conservation are very important environmental concerns both at national and international levels. At present entire world is facing the challenges of climate change. To curb the challenges environment plays a very significant role. There are pockets of sacred lands which are protected by the tribal and indigenous people to protect the biodiversity our survival and well-being. From their age-old indigenous medical knowledge, tribal people can preserve the biodiversity resources which are available near their surroundings. It is inevitable that at present 25 per cent of the medicines sold at the international level are derived from plant sources. One-fourth of the plant species are used by the indigenous people to prepare traditional medicine around the world. In India, ecologically unique and biodiversity-rich regions are legally protected as biosphere reserves, national parks and sanctuaries. India now has 14 biosphere reserves, 90 national parks and 448 wildlife sanctuaries. India also has a history of religious and cultural traditions that convey the significance of the protection of nature. In many cultures, tracts of forest were set aside, and all the trees and wildlife within were venerated and given total protection. Such as sacred groves of many tribal belts of India. Sacred grooves are a rich source of underground water and rich source of biodiversity reserves. Therefore, it is an urgent need of the hour to act on the preservation and conservation of sacred grooves in India.

Nowadays, in India, the tribal people with their indigenous knowledge of nature continue to maintain the sacred groves. However, all tribal communities have their own religious and socio-cultural identities. Despite rapid modernization and the destruction of usual faith, the indigenous Santal people of Jharkhand were able to preserve sacred grooves at the community level. More support is required from the government regarding protection preservation and conservation of the rich biodiversity of the sacred grove. It is believed that the traditional belief systems circumscribed by the sacred groves prevent social conflicts in a very unique way. The study of the sacred groove eventually illustrates the socio-cultural factors along with the religious activities in Santal village. The Sacred Grove encompasses mostly a small area in the vicinity of the village and the place is thrived by different ethnomedicinal plants. These Santals are compassionate people who have been able to protect their environment and create a balanced ecology from their age-old practices of growing new species of plants and by further

preserving the extinct medicinal plant species in their environment. The protection and preservation of the sacred groves require several initiatives by the Government of India to develop a sustainable approach that balances the ecosystem.

As these groves' sustainability is at stake due to diverse controls, it is highly recommended that governmental land be best preserved if all these are turned over to the forest department to be maintained as preservation plots. It would be even better if all such groves could be made as part of a natural preservation system, a proposal at present being considered by the Indian Board of Wild Life. It is suggested that sacred groves must be preserved permanently by setting them up as a network of preservation plots under the jurisdiction of the forest department (Gadgil et al,1976:152-160). Since WHO has recommended going back to the Indigenous method of treatment, I feel it is time to take one step forward and put all our logistics into understanding the tribal ways of looking at the environment and inculcating positive habits to learn from their life how each one of us can contribute towards saving and preserving our ecology sustainably. One needs to create balance to serve the tribal and ecology holistically. The approach should be not to exploit the tribal people but to find a way how one can reach out and provide benefits to everyone for the betterment of a safe and clean environment. So let us focus and try to learn from the tribal culture which is a good source of knowledge to sensitise the nation in various ways. Let us save our natural and cultural heritage together for the benefit of our generation to come. It is further suggested that workshops can be conducted with the villagers and also with the common people where awareness can be created to sensitise the population towards the preservation of the sacred grove. Thus, I wish the sounds of the drums the melody of the singing and the lullaby of the Baha festival must be echoed incessantly throughout the country so that the essence of preservation, indigenous knowledge, and sustainability can reverberate nonstop with a new flavour of learning for the coming generation.

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## **Evaluating the Impact of the 33% Reservation Law on Women's Representation in Indian Parliament: A Step Towards Gender Equality.**

**Saima Nazir**

### **Abstract**

*This research critically evaluates the implications of India's 33% Reservation Law on women's representation within the political sphere, aiming to assess its effectiveness as a mechanism for achieving gender equality. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data is analyzed to trace the historical evolution and current statistical landscape of women's political representation, both pre- and post-implementation of the law. Qualitatively, the research engages in a comparative analysis with other nations that have similar legislative frameworks, thereby placing the Indian experience within a global context. The investigation also includes a critical assessment of the policy implications and recommendations stemming from the findings, revealing a complex narrative that encompasses legal mandates, societal attitudes, and political engagement. Despite the significant legislative initiative represented by the 33% Reservation Law, the study finds that its effectiveness is considerably influenced by the broader societal and political milieu. The paper argues for a holistic approach that goes beyond legal mandates to foster a conducive environment for women's political participation, aligning India more closely with global gender equality standards.*

### **Introduction:**

India, with its rich historical tapestry and complex socio-political landscape, has witnessed a persistent gender disparity in political representation. The patriarchal norms embedded within the societal fabric have often acted as formidable barriers, thwarting women's access to political corridors. Amidst a global wave of gender-inclusive policies, India too embarked on a seminal journey towards bridging this gender gap through the introduction of the 33% Reservation Law. This legislation, aimed at reserving 33% of seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for

women, marked a pivotal moment in the nation's legislative history. It reflected a collective aspiration to foster a gender-balanced political ecosystem, thereby aligning with the global ethos of gender equality. The narrative of women's political representation in India is intertwined with a broader discourse on gender equality and empowerment. The historic underrepresentation of women in political domains underscores a systemic bias and poses pressing questions on the inclusivity and democracy within the political framework. The 33% Reservation Law, formally known as the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, emerged as a legislative response to this systemic gender bias. By earmarking a fixed quota of parliamentary seats for women, the law endeavors to create a level playing field, enabling more women to partake in the political discourse. The inception of the 33% Reservation Law can be traced back to the early 1990s, culminating in a robust debate that spanned across political ideologies, social spectrums, and gender narratives. The law was envisaged as a mechanism to challenge and alter the patriarchal status quo that permeated the political arena. It sought to instigate a paradigm shift from a predominantly male-centric political narrative to a more inclusive and gender-balanced narrative. This legal provision, however, is not devoid of criticism and debate. The discourse surrounding the 33% reservation traverses through a myriad of perspectives, encompassing arguments on meritocracy, tokenism, and the actual empowerment it offers to women.

This research seeks to delve deep into the realms of this legislative initiative, evaluating its impact on women's representation in the Indian Parliament. The objective is to discern whether the law has been successful in altering the gender dynamics within the political sphere and if it has paved the way for a more egalitarian political environment. The examination extends beyond mere statistical analysis of women's representation pre and post the law; Furthermore, a comparative analysis with other nations having similar gender reservation laws will offer a global perspective, the paper aims to contribute a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender, law, and politics in the Indian context. The exploration of the 33% Reservation Law and its impact on women's political representation holds significance in the broader narrative of gender equality and political inclusivity in India. It resonates with the global discourse on women's empowerment, offering a lens to scrutinize the synergies and dissonances between legal frameworks, gender

norms, and political representation. Through this examination, the research seeks to contribute to the burgeoning body of knowledge on gender and politics in India, while also offering policy recommendations to further the cause of gender equality in the political domain. Despite the potential benefits of the 33% Reservation Law aimed at increasing women's representation in the Indian Parliament, there are significant critiques concerning its impact on meritocracy, tokenism, and the long-term sustainability of gender equality in political representation. This paper will also explore these criticisms in detail to offer a comprehensive understanding of the law's implications.

### **Understanding Women's Representation and the 33% Reservation Law:**

The discourse on women's representation in political landscapes is rooted in the broader dialogues on gender equality and democratic governance. Women's representation encapsulates the involvement of women in various political arenas, including elected offices, policy-making bodies, and leadership positions across all tiers of government. The global narrative underscores a conspicuous gender disparity in political realms, often sustained and exacerbated by deep-rooted patriarchal norms, systemic biases, and socio-cultural barriers (Paxton 2007, 263-284). Over the decades, the urgency to bridge the gender gap in political domains has garnered global attention, prompting nations to embrace affirmative actions and gender-sensitive policies to foster a more gender-balanced political ecosystem.

At the core of the global endeavor to enhance women's political representation is the recognition of the indispensable role women play in fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic society. The presence of women in political spheres contributes to a more holistic perspective in policymaking, reflecting the diverse needs and concerns of the entire population. Furthermore, women's political representation is often seen as a crucial step towards challenging and dismantling patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender inequalities (Childs 2008, 725-736).

Transitioning to the Indian context, the narrative of women's representation takes a unique contour, reflective of the nation's complex socio-political and cultural tapestry. The 33% Reservation Law emerges as a landmark legislation aimed at ameliorating the gender disparity in political representation within India. This law mandates a 33% reservation of seats for women in the Lok

Sabha (House of the People) and state legislative assemblies, marking a significant stride towards fostering a gender-equitable political environment. The journey towards the enactment of the 33% Reservation Law dates back to the early 1990s, mirroring a longstanding endeavor to challenge and alter the patriarchal status quo that pervaded the political arena (G. & Palanithurai 1999, 246). The law was envisaged as a mechanism to catalyze a shift from a predominantly male-centric political narrative to a more inclusive and gender-balanced narrative. The legal provision for a 33% reservation for women was seen as a necessary corrective measure to address the historical injustice meted out to women concerning political participation.

The significance of the 33% Reservation Law is manifold. Firstly, it represents a conscious effort to rectify the historical gender imbalance in political representation, thereby creating a more level playing field for women in the political domain. Secondly, the law aligns India with the global ethos of gender equality and women's empowerment, resonating with international standards set forth in frameworks like the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Moreover, the law holds the potential to alter societal perceptions of women's roles and capabilities, challenging entrenched patriarchal norms. The increased visibility and participation of women in politics are envisaged to act as a catalyst for changing societal attitudes towards gender equality (Duflo 2005, 668-678). Furthermore, women's representation in politics is often associated with the advocacy for gender-sensitive policies, reflecting a more holistic and inclusive approach to policy-making. The 33% Reservation Law also invites a discourse on meritocracy versus reservation, engendering a debate on whether gender-based reservations undermine merit or act as a necessary corrective measure to redress systemic gender biases. This discourse extends to the effectiveness and adequacy of quota systems in achieving the desired objectives of gender equality in political representation.

### **Historical Evolution:**

The narrative surrounding the 33% Reservation Law for women in the Indian Parliament is a historical journey marked by numerous legislative initiatives and socio-political dynamics. Here's a detailed examination of the evolution of the 33% Reservation Law, reflecting on the various

legislative and political milestones. The discourse surrounding the 33% reservation for women in political bodies commenced with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993. These amendments mandated a 33% reservation for women in local self-governance bodies, namely, the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipal Bodies, laying down the initial framework for gender-inclusive representation in governance structures<sup>1</sup>. With the passage of the Women's reservation Bill in 1996, the conversation about expanding this reserve to state legislatures and the Parliament gathered steam. With the passage of this bill, women will have 33% of the seats in the state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha, (the lower house) of the Indian parliament. Nevertheless, the Bill faced strong opposition and expired as a result of many political and social causes, delaying its passage into law for many years even though it was proposed in the Parliament several times throughout the years.<sup>23</sup>.

Early in the twenty-first century, the conversation was reignited with renewed vigor, reflecting a growing social and political consciousness towards gender equality and women's empowerment. After decades of political talks, societal mobilization, and campaigning for a more gender-inclusive political framework, the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, also known as the 33% Reservation Law, was finally passed. A 33% reservation for women is required under this statute for both the Lok Sabha and state legislatures. But it was said that the quota will only take effect by 2029, following the delineation of seats, which is scheduled to happen following the next census, which is probably going to take place after the general elections in 2024.<sup>4</sup>.

### **Comparative Analysis.**

The quest for gender parity in political representation embodies a global endeavor transcending national boundaries. Among the plethora of strategies adopted across nations, legislated electoral quotas have emerged as a seminal mechanism to redress gender disparities in political institutions. India, through its 33% Reservation Law, has positioned itself within the cohort of nations adopting such legislative measures to bolster women's representation in political domains. This section endeavors to delineate a comparative analysis of India's 33% Reservation Law with global gender

reservation laws, aspiring to unveil a nuanced understanding of India's legislative landscape juxtaposed against global paradigms.

### **Global Landscape of Gender Reservation Laws:**

At the fulcrum of this comparative analysis lies an exploration of the global landscape of gender reservation laws. Rwanda, celebrated for having a remarkable 56.3% female representation in its lower house, emerges as a beacon of gender-inclusive political representation (**Tripp 2003, 10-18**). Conversely, nations like Saudi Arabia had no female representation until recently. Amidst this global spectrum, the pioneering stride of India through the 33% Reservation Law marks a substantial legislative endeavor towards fostering gender parity in political representation. The tapestry of reservation policies in India unveils a rich trajectory of legislative and socio-political dynamics. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 heralded the era of reservations for women in local self-governance bodies, embarking on a journey towards gender-inclusive political representation (**Beall 2006, 20-45**). The discourse further evolved with the Women's Reservation Bill 2023, extending the reservation ambit to state legislatures and the Parliament (**G. Palanithurai 2007, 246-257**). This legislative endeavor rekindles the decades-long debate on gender representation in India, reflecting the nuanced socio-political dynamics underpinning gender reservation policies. Juxtaposing India's reservation model with global paradigms unveils a myriad of facets. Countries like Bolivia and Rwanda have adopted legislated electoral quotas to foster gender equality in political representation. Conversely, nations like Sweden and Norway have veered towards voluntary party quotas (**Dahlerup 2005, 26-48**). The effectiveness, challenges, and socio-political intricacies of these varied models offer a plethora of insights, reflecting the complex interplay of socio-political factors in achieving gender parity in political representation.

The discourse transcends mere statistical representation, encapsulating broader narratives of meritocracy versus reservation, and the socio-political undercurrents influencing gender reservation policies. The comparative analysis seeks to unravel the broader implications of the 33% Reservation Law on India's democratic fabric and its standing on the global stage concerning

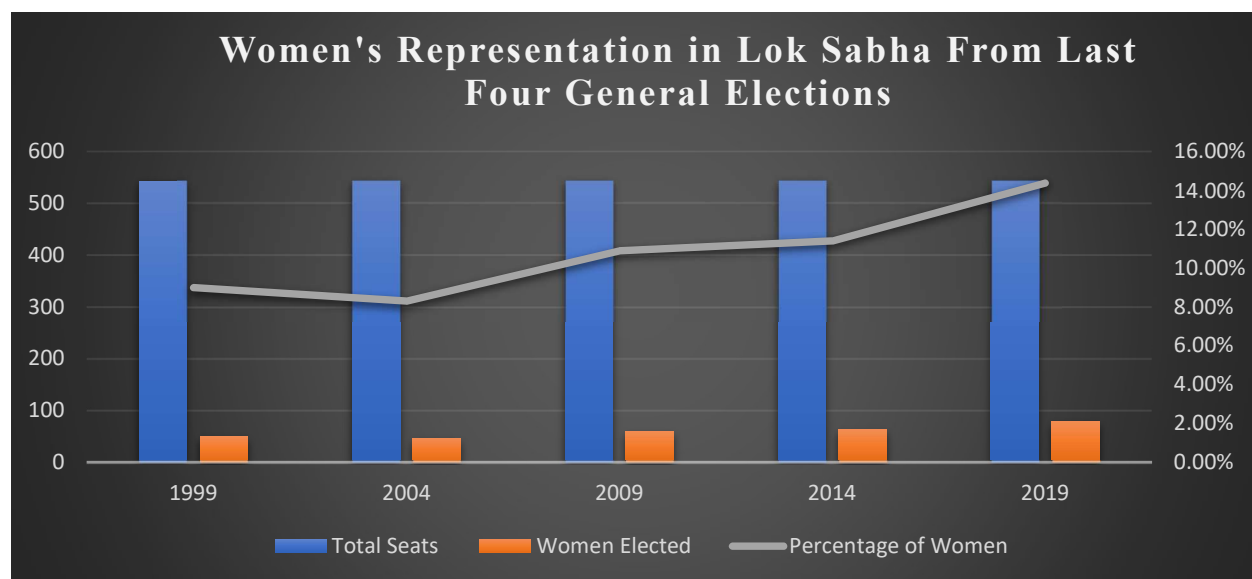
gender equality in political representation. Furthermore, it endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding of the law's potential to drive a paradigm shift towards a more gender-balanced political narrative, both within India and in a global context.

### **Pre-Law Statistic Spectrum:**

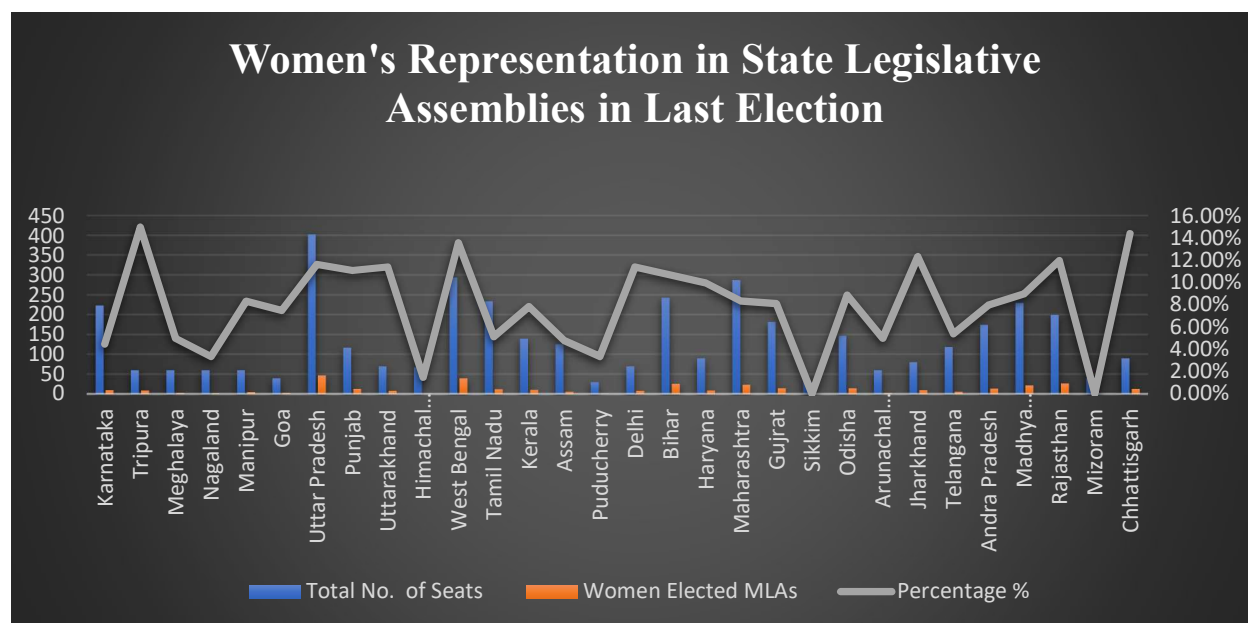
The democratic fabric of India is intricately interwoven with multifarious threads of diversity, encompassing myriad social, cultural, and political nuances. At the heart of this vibrant democracy lies the legislative bodies, which epitomize the spirit of representation and inclusivity. However, the representation of women, constituting approximately half the populace, remains a realm necessitating thorough exploration and analysis. The discourse on gender inclusivity within the political sphere of India is not merely a reflection of democratic principles but also a testament to the societal attitudes and norms governing the gender dynamics<sup>5</sup>. The 33% reservation law, envisaged to augment the representation of women in legislative bodies, has sparked a plethora of discussions and debates concerning its potential impact. Prior to assessing the ramifications of this law, it is imperative to delineate the pre-law landscape of women's representation in the legislative bodies at both national and state levels.

The Lok Sabha, being the lower house of the Parliament of India, mirrors the broader narrative of gender representation within the national political spectrum. Historical data elucidates a trajectory of modest yet steady progress concerning women's representation in the Lok Sabha. For instance, the representation of women witnessed an increment from a mere 4.4% in the 1951 elections to 14.36% in the 2019 elections (**Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020**). Despite this progress, the representation is significantly shy of the envisaged 33%, underscoring a persistent gender disparity. The table below encapsulates the trajectory of women's representation in Lok Sabha over the years:





On the other hand, the Rajya Sabha, being the upper house, also reflects a similar narrative of underrepresentation. The dynamics of representation in the Rajya Sabha, however, are somewhat different due to its nature of indirect elections and nominations. Nevertheless, the gender disparity is palpable and calls for a thorough examination. The average number of female Rajya Sabha members is 9.5%, with the highest being 12.7% in 2014. In 2020, women occupied more than 10% of the seats in Rajya Sabha. The general percentage of women elected to Rajya Sabha stands at 14.05% as per available data. Transitioning the lens to the state-level political arena provides a more granular understanding of gender representational dynamics. The diversity in cultural, political, and social norms across different states in India manifests itself in the varied representation of women in the state legislative assemblies. The table below elucidates the representation of women in various state legislative assemblies as of the last respective elections.



<sup>6</sup>An analysis of the data reveals a wide spectrum of representational disparity across different states. States like Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Tripura have showcased a relatively higher representation of women, whereas states like Mizoram and Nagaland etc, exhibit a glaring absence of women representation. This heterogeneity is emblematic of the diverse cultural and political ethos prevalent across different regions of the country.

The juxtaposition of national and state-level data illuminates the multi-faceted challenges and opportunities inherent in the quest for achieving gender parity in political representation. It sets the stage for a nuanced evaluation of the potential impact of the 33% reservation law, providing a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis entailed in this research endeavor.

### Impact Assessment: Gender Dynamics in Political Sphere

The enactment of the 33% Reservation Law has heralded a significant shift in the gender dynamics within the political sphere of India. This segment aims to elucidate the manifold impacts engendered by this legislative measure, scrutinizing the quantitative and qualitative transformations it has engendered within the political arena.

The immediate and most palpable impact of the 33% Reservation Law is the augmentation of female representation within legislative bodies. The statute has facilitated a more substantial presence of women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, thereby fostering a more gender-balanced political milieu. This increased representation has not only challenged the entrenched patriarchal norms but has also rendered the political arena more reflective of the diverse populace it governs. Moreover, the enhanced participation of women has nurtured a more inclusive discourse within the legislative chambers, bringing forth a myriad of perspectives that were hitherto underrepresented or overlooked.

The increased representation of women has engendered a discernible shift in the policy formulation process. Women legislators, with their unique experiences and perspectives, have championed a range of issues that were previously sidelined<sup>7</sup>. The advocacy for gender-sensitive policies has gained momentum, with an increased focus on issues such as women's health, education, and safety. Furthermore, the discourse around gender equality has been propelled to the forefront of the political agenda, fostering a more holistic and inclusive approach to policy formulation and implementation.

The 33% Reservation Law has also impacted societal perceptions and norms surrounding women's roles within the political domain. The visibility of women in positions of power and decision-making has begun to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and has engendered a gradual shift in societal attitudes towards women's capabilities and roles. Moreover, the law has also galvanized a discourse around meritocracy and reservations, instigating a broader societal reflection on the entrenched gender biases and the necessity for affirmative action to redress historical injustices.

The law has also fostered a sense of empowerment and agency among women. The provision of a political platform has empowered women to voice their concerns, advocate for their rights, and actively participate in the governance process. Moreover, the law has also inspired a new generation of female political aspirants, nurturing a culture of political engagement and activism among women. The 33% Reservation Law has engendered a significant transformation within the gender dynamics of India's political sphere. The manifold impacts elucidated above underscore the

law's pivotal role in fostering a more gender-balanced and inclusive political milieu. The ongoing discourse around this legislative measure, coupled with the tangible shifts within the political arena, epitomize the gradual yet discernible stride towards gender equality and political inclusivity in India.

*Questioning the Meritocracy:* One of the primary critiques of the 33% reservation law is its perceived challenge to meritocracy. Opponents argue that reservations may compromise the quality of political representation by prioritizing gender over capability and experience. Critics assert that such quota systems can potentially lower the standard of political leadership by filling seats with candidates chosen for their gender rather than their qualifications or political acumen **(Bacchi, 2006, 23-48)**. This concern is echoed in discussions around affirmative action globally, where merit-based selection processes are seen as being undermined by quota systems **(Jones, 2009, 53-66)**.

*Tokenism and Symbolic Representation:* Another significant critique is that the reservation may lead to tokenism, where women elected through quotas are viewed not as genuine contributors, but as symbolic figures meant to fulfill a legislative requirement. This perception can undermine the authority and legitimacy of women politicians, constraining their effectiveness in office. The fear of tokenism is linked to broader issues of gender stereotypes and societal perceptions of women's roles in leadership and decision-making processes **(Krook, 2006, 303-227)**.

*Sustainability of Change:* Critics also question the sustainability of changes brought about by enforced quotas. They argue that while quotas can alter the composition of legislatures in the short term, they do not necessarily lead to a long-term cultural shift towards gender inclusivity in politics. This argument suggests that without a genuine shift in societal attitudes towards gender equality, the impact of quotas may be superficial and diminish once the legislative requirements are lifted **(Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005 46-48)**.

*Impact on Political Dynamics:* There is also concern about how gender quotas might affect the internal dynamics of political parties and the broader legislative process. Some suggest that quotas could lead to polarization within parties, as male members may feel threatened by the enforced

inclusion of female candidates, potentially leading to internal conflicts or a dilution of the party's policy focus (Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012, 45-278).

In response to these critiques, it's crucial for proponents of the reservation law to strengthen mechanisms that ensure the effective integration and empowerment of women within political structures, beyond mere numerical representation. Addressing issues of meritocracy, tokenism, and the long-term sustainability of gender equality initiatives within the political framework can provide a more holistic approach to gender representation in politics.

### **Policy Implications and Recommendations.**

The implementation of the 33% Reservation Law in India has discernible policy implications, reflecting a pivotal stride toward institutionalizing gender equality within the political arena. It exemplifies a proactive legislative approach to redressing the historically entrenched gender disparity in political representation. This law, by design, challenges the patriarchal status quo, promoting a more inclusive political discourse. However, the realization of its objectives necessitates a conducive socio-political environment, underpinned by a broader societal acknowledgment and acceptance of women's rightful place in politics. The global comparative analysis elucidates that merely legislating gender quotas may not suffice to foster genuine political inclusivity. Countries like Rwanda and Bolivia, despite their gender quota laws, exhibit varying degrees of success, influenced by a myriad of socio-political and cultural factors. The effectiveness of gender quota laws is significantly contingent on the broader socio-political milieu, the enforcement mechanisms in place, and the societal attitudes toward gender equality.

### **Recommendations:**

*Holistic Enforcement:* Effective enforcement mechanisms are critical to ensure adherence to the 33% reservation mandate. This entails not merely filling the reserved seats but ensuring that women legislators are empowered to perform their roles effectively.

*Capacity Building:* Instituting capacity-building programs for women legislators to equip them with the requisite skills and knowledge is pivotal. This would entail training in legislative

procedures, policy advocacy, and leadership, enhancing their ability to navigate the political landscape.

*Public Awareness Campaigns:* Conducting public awareness campaigns to challenge and change societal stereotypes regarding women's roles in politics is imperative. This would contribute to creating a more conducive environment for women's political participation.

*Engagement with Political Parties:* Encouraging political parties to adopt internal gender equality policies, including voluntary gender quotas, can further bolster women's representation. Political parties play a crucial role as gatekeepers to political participation; hence their engagement is critical.

*Monitoring and Evaluation:* Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of the 33% Reservation Law is essential. This would provide invaluable insights into the law's effectiveness, challenges encountered, and the progress made toward achieving gender equality in political representation.

*Learning from Global Best Practices:* Drawing lessons from the experiences of countries with similar gender quota laws can provide valuable insights. Tailoring these learnings to the Indian context can contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the 33% Reservation Law.

*Engendering Policy Discourse:* Ensuring that the policy discourse is engendered to reflect the needs and interests of both men and women is crucial. Women legislators should be encouraged to engage in a broad spectrum of policy issues, transcending stereotypical gender-focused domains.

*Creating Supportive Networks:* Establishing supportive networks for women legislators can provide a platform for mentorship, knowledge sharing, and collective advocacy. Such networks can play a crucial role in fostering a more gender-inclusive political environment.

The policy implications of the 33% Reservation Law are profound, reflecting a significant policy shift toward gender inclusivity. The recommendations provided aim to enhance the law's effectiveness, ensuring that it serves as a catalyst for engendering India's political sphere, aligning with the broader ethos of gender equality and women's empowerment.

## Conclusion:

The quest for gender equality in political representation is a global endeavor, with the 33% Reservation Law in India marking a significant legislative initiative aimed at redressing historical gender disparity in political domains. Through a blend of quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research has endeavored to provide a nuanced understanding of the law's impact on women's representation in the Indian Parliament. The comparative analysis with other nations having similar gender reservation laws offers a global perspective, demonstrating the complexities and the multifaceted nature of the issue. While the law sets a precedent in legal terms, the effectiveness of such legislation is largely contingent on broader societal attitudes and the political milieu. The policy implications and recommendations section underscores the need for a holistic approach that transcends legal mandates, highlighting the importance of enforcement mechanisms, capacity building for women legislators, engagement with political parties, and public awareness campaigns to foster a conducive environment for women's political participation. The 33% Reservation Law is a stepping stone towards creating a more gender-balanced political landscape in India. However, achieving genuine gender equality in political representation requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the government, political parties, civil society, and the public at large. The discourse should evolve beyond mere statistical representation to fostering an enabling environment that empowers women to participate effectively in the political arena. The learnings from this research could serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, academics, and activists engaged in promoting gender equality in political representation, not only in India but globally. The journey towards gender equality is long and arduous, but with informed policymaking and collective action, a more gender-balanced political sphere is an achievable aspiration.

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# **Perspective Section**

## Human security, gender and labour rights in tea gardens of Assam

Anamika Adhikari and Shubhrajeet Konwer

### Abstract

*The article focuses on the rights of women labourers in the tea plantations of Assam within the framework of human security, which covers the notion of 'freedom from want'. The economic contribution and the hardship endured by women labourers in the Assam tea industry are often overlooked. Within the verdant environs of the tea gardens in Assam, where the olfactory essence of newly plucked leaves harmonises with the toils of labour, women have played an essential role in fostering the expansion and success of the tea industry. The objective of this essay is to provide insight into the experiences, problems, and contributions of women working in tea gardens. The living and working conditions of women in tea gardens are examined in detail, addressing issues such as inadequate housing, meagre wages, long working hours, and limited access to healthcare and education. The essay also examines the prevailing gender discrepancies, emphasising the existence of income gaps, uneven opportunities, and occurrences of sexual harassment that continue to remain within this particular sector. Moreover, the study aims to examine the physical and mental health as well as the overall well-being of female labourers employed in tea gardens. This article calls for a more fair and inclusive tea industry, recognising that women play an important part in every cup of 'chai' and that they need to be given more power to shape the future of India's tea frontier.*

### Introduction

With the strong backing of economist Amartya Sen, Mahbub ul Haq developed a holistic paradigm of human development at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which gave rise to the idea of human security. The first significant international document to conceptually define human security and offer recommendations for action and policy was the UNDP's Global Human Development Report (HDR) from 1994 (Gospel, 2017, p.3). The 1994 HDR argued that security has 'for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy, or as global security from a nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than people' (Gospel, 2017

**p.3).** Human security encompasses ‘the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair’ (Steiner, 2019, p.5). An essential element of this concept also centres on the notion of ‘freedom from want.’ When examined within the framework of women's rights and their empowerment, several concerns must be addressed by the state, corporate enterprises, and civil society organisations.

In a developing country like India, the female labour force has faced a variety of challenges, ranging from low labour force participation to workplace discrimination. Along with the persistent gender wage gap, the Indian economy is characterised by several other striking features like low and declining women’s workforce participation rate in periods of high-income growth and wide divergence in women’s workforce participation rate across rural and urban areas. Even though women's labour force participation in India is dropping in general, the tea sector in India employs the greatest number of female workers. In India, the tea industry is the only organised industry with a high number of female workers. The tea business is one of the oldest and largest in India, and it is also one of the finest organised sectors in the country. Over 1.1 million people are currently employed in the organised tea sector across the tea-growing states. In the tea gardens, women make up more than half of the overall labour force (Bhadra, 1985, p. 94). The majority of Indian tea plantations are found in rural highlands and backward districts of the North Eastern and Southern states. The primary tea-growing regions in India are Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Karnataka, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Bihar are the other tea-growing states.

In Assam's tea estates, women encounter several difficulties due to inequalities and gender discrimination (Sarkar & Pal, 2023, p. 21). Therefore, it becomes important to examine the rights and conditions under which women in Assam's workforce operate. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to analyse the state of affairs for women who work in Assam's tea gardens and second and to provide a general overview of the state of affairs in the tea industry in Assam. This descriptive article mostly uses data collected from secondary resources including books, journals and government reports.

### **The role of women in the tea gardens of Assam**

The position of women and their involvement in the workforce in India, specifically in Assam, has seen various fluctuations. According to the 'India@75' roadmap proposed by the Niti Aayog, it is recommended that the government make efforts to increase the involvement of women in the labour force to reach a target of 30 per cent. The platform of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has outlined its intention to develop an all-encompassing roadmap titled 'Women in the Employment', with a primary objective of significantly augmenting the rate of female employment participation within five years. Additionally, it committed to promoting the creation of improved job prospects for women inside firms. According to Rituparna Chakraborty, president of the Indian Staffing Federation, the government must establish a narrative that accurately communicates its intended actions and safeguards against potential negative consequences, as exemplified by the previous experience with the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 (Sharma, 2019, p 30).

The tea plantation industry has a significant position within the agricultural sector of Assam. Situated in Northeast India, the state of Assam accounts for around 55% of the total tea production in India and contributes to roughly one-sixth of the global tea output. Moreover, half of the country's total tea-growing area is accounted for by the cultivated land area. The creation of the tea business in Assam had a profound impact on both the demographic composition of the region and the social history of the tea garden labourers in Assam. Tea cultivation is practised in both the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley regions of Assam. The districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Sonitpur, and Biswanath are recognised as the primary regions where tea estates are mostly located (Official Website, Government of Assam).

Due to substantial labour demands of the tea industry, women have been engaged in different capacities. It is important to note that the plantation sector demonstrates patriarchal authority, and the sign of the "planter-manager-sahib" is readily visible among the plantation labourer community (Duara and Mallick, 2019, p.16). Among the tea labour workforce in tea gardens, a significant majority around 50 to 60% are involved in the task of crop harvesting. It must be highlighted that it is a customary practice to assign women the task of plucking tea leaves due to the perception that females had superior manual dexterity for this particular activity; in contrast, male labourers often get alternative assignments inside the plantations, including tasks such as weed removal, pesticide and fertiliser application (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, p. 15). In Assam, among this subset of crop harvesting labourers, approximately 80% are women. The prevailing discourse around tea plantations

mostly centres on matters like as production and export, sometimes resulting in the neglect of the critical concerns faced by tea garden employees. Moreover, the concerns of female labourers in the gardens are also marginalised. Females constitute a majority proportion of the workforce employed in tea gardens located in the region of Assam. The working class in the tea gardens of Assam, comprising around 50% of the labour force, may be seen as one of the most marginalised groups within the organised sector of the economy, experiencing significant exploitation. The presence of low earnings, inadequate housing, and limited opportunities for upward social mobility has been a persistent and prevalent issue from the establishment of this phenomenon in the early 19th century and no substantial changes have been noticed (**Ansari and Shereen, 2016**). According to Loitongbam, the predicament faced by tea plantation workers in Assam is indicative of the 'collective failure of markets, the state, and civil society' (**Loitongbam, 2021, p. 45**).

### **The status of women labourers in the tea plantations of Assam**

The 'freedom from want' encompasses various types of insecurity, including economic, sustenance, health, environmental, and personal (**United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, 2016**). The women labourers working in the tea plantations of Assam face several challenges, and the efforts to enhance their empowerment remain a formidable task for governmental bodies. Amalendu Guha, in his book "Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947," provides a clear and insightful analysis of the position of women in the tea industry during the colonial era and the hardships they endured at the hands of their 'masters' (**Kalita, Handique and Borgohain, 2022, p. 318**). Perhaps, while political participation has been made possible, true economic empowerment remains a considerable challenge, even in contemporary times. The status of female labourers on the tea plantations of Assam after India's attainment of independence in 1947 has emerged as a subject of significant apprehension and deliberation. The tea estates in Assam possess a lengthy historical background and have traditionally been reliant on a labour force mostly comprised of workers, with a significant proportion being women. Twenty years ago, Mishra pointed out that "With a few exceptions, most of the gardens have little to show in the field of medical facilities and sanitation, while the housing facilities are quite primitive, there being no provision for electricity in most garden" (**Misra, 2003, p. 3030**). Nothing has essentially changed, as women workers continue to face similar challenges even today. According to many news sources, female labourers employed in the tea plantations of Assam possess little

exposure to external environments and lack awareness about labour rights, rendering them very susceptible to different sorts of exploitation. Females experience exploitation and subjugation by men in both household and professional spheres (**Datta, 2017, p. 55**). The tea plantations provide as both a location of employment and a residential environment for many people. The distinction between the two is often fuzzy. Female employees often encounter instances of domestic abuse and harassment both inside and beyond the confines of tea estates.

Furthermore, female labourers are allocated a subordinate position within the functional and social structure of tea estates. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the working circumstances experienced by female labourers in the tea plantations of Assam since the attainment of independence. The tea estates of Assam often provide women employees with arduous and terrible working conditions. The individuals in question have the responsibility of harvesting tea leaves, a task that requires prolonged periods of upright posture and bending at the waist when working in the fields. The nature of the job may require significant physical exertion and result in fatigue. The workplace in question lacks both a clean drinking water supply and adequate restroom facilities.

The housing and healthcare provisions in several tea estates have shown inadequate conditions. The living conditions of workers and their families sometimes include residing in confined and unsanitary accommodations. The provision of high-quality healthcare has also been a difficulty in some regions. A research conducted by the legal empowerment organization Nazdeek in the year 2018, found that women working in Assam's tea gardens, particularly those who are not employed full-time, struggle with anaemia due to a lack of access to adequate nourishment and medical treatment (**Mitra, 2018**). Despite significant progress and a decrease in figures, Assam continues to have high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates, which are among the highest in India. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) and infant mortality rate (IMR) exhibit higher values within rural regions and among individuals belonging to the tea garden workers population. Maternal and newborn mortality rates are influenced by factors such as anaemia, malnutrition, early pregnancies, and inadequate healthcare access, and serve as indicators of gender disparities prevalent in communities. Reports suggest that 'Government efforts to stem anaemia and maternal mortality for Adivasi women working on tea plantations in Assam have not worked efficiently' (**The Wire, 2018**). Essentially, In the tea gardens of Assam, women workers have to confront multiple challenges.

Despite comprising a substantial portion of the workforce in the tea sector, women mostly occupy positions that are remunerated at the lowest levels, such as those involving plucking, trimming, and hoeing. Moreover, these occupations include significant physical exertion, necessitating prolonged periods of standing, walking, and the transportation of heavy objects. The representation of women in managerial and decision-making roles within the tea business is very low. The participation of women employees in the bargaining and decision-making processes inside workers' unions is notably lacking. Trade unions fight for better pay and working conditions as well as a safe and healthy workplace for both men and women. They exist to represent the needs and interests of all of their members. Gender concerns must therefore be specifically taken into account in collective bargaining; certain issues may affect women more than others because of their reproductive role, because of the role that they are expected to play in providing for their families and households, or because of historical discrimination. At the same time, these issues are not limited to women in that men also need certain types of protection regarding their reproductive function, and measures are needed to provide men with opportunities to share more in family responsibilities, such as paternity and parental leave, flexible working hours and greater access to part-time work.

Women employees have been subjected to many forms of exploitation, such as instances of sexual harassment and abuse. The geographical seclusion of tea plantations, along with the precarious conditions faced by the labour force, has been influential factors in the emergence of these problems. According to a survey conducted by United Nations Women, women in Assam encounter instances of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse both inside and beyond the confines of the plantations. Individuals may also encounter instances of sexual harassment and other manifestations of gender-based violence inside professional environments and public areas. The tea estates in Assam have seen ongoing efforts and challenges in the pursuit of labour rights and improved working conditions. Labour organisations and activists have been instrumental in pushing for the rights of tea garden workers, with a particular focus on the inclusion of women. However, a significant proportion of women lack awareness of their fundamental rights, rendering them susceptible to becoming victims of rights violations.

In several tea-producing nations, such as Kenya, efforts have been made by tea producers to tackle gender-related concerns and instances of gender-based violence within the work environment. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that many domains have seen advancements through time; nonetheless, obstacles continue to



endure. The circumstances inside different tea gardens may exhibit significant variation, and the efforts made to solve these difficulties have not been consistently successful. Looking into the issues of rights of women workers in the tea gardens of Assam, Kushwah points out that, 'The Assam tea industry represents an example of a supply chain with high risks of human rights violations' (Kushwah, 2022, p. 5). Multiple parties, encompassing governmental entities, plantation proprietors, and labour unions, persistently attempt to enhance the circumstances for women and other labourers within the tea gardens of Assam. Furthermore, the 'contractualisation' in the tea plantation sector in Assam has not helped the cause of women (Singh, 2021). The Assam Budget for fiscal 2023-24 contains a commitment to compensate tea garden workers, who hold half of the state's 14 Lok Sabha seats. It remains to be seen, however, if this will make a difference in the lives of women labourers (Karmakar, 2023). It is thus evident that substantial progress is yet to be achieved.

## Conclusion

The issue of human security, particularly about female labourers on tea plantations, continues to be a subject of significant concern. While the consumption of tea is prevalent in more than 80 per cent of Indian homes, the plight of women workers continues to be neglected. However, the tea workers, especially women tea pluckers, get significantly low earnings, which is a cause for concern. The perpetuation of structural poverty has resulted in the continued impoverishment of several generations of workers. Women experience a dual kind of marginalisation and isolation within this particular process. It is essential to conduct a thorough examination of this matter and effectively mitigate the many risks that women encounter within this particular realm of occupation, with the ultimate goal of promoting fairness and establishing a secure working environment. It is imperative that many stakeholders, including the government, corporate sector, civil society, and specialist service providers, collaborate to establish a shared agenda and commitment to combat gender-based violence. This collaboration should focus on the development and execution of policies and laws, as well as the establishment of effective response mechanisms. The effective and sustained prevention and mitigation of gender-based violence necessitates the active involvement of several stakeholders, including local government, community organisations, and individuals from diverse demographic categories such as youth, men, and women.

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## The Role of Family Dynamics in Influencing Psychological Wellbeing of the Adolescents

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### Abstract

*Family is the primary foundation of individual and societal wellbeing, offering emotional, social, and economic support. Family nurtures development, preserves cultural heritage, and provides a sense of identity and belongingness. Family dynamics encompasses how family members communicate, relate to each other, and function together as a unit. In modern times, the shift from traditional joint families to nuclear, single-parental, and diverse forms has impacted the mental health and development of adolescents. The current study examines how family dynamics influence the psychological wellbeing of adolescents, emphasizing the aspects of family climates, family relationships, family types, and parenting styles. Analysis of previous literature revealed that supportive family dynamics with open communication and nurturing environments enhance the psychological wellbeing of adolescents. Adolescents in stable, two-parent families are better in terms of psychological and physical health compared to those experiencing multiple family transitions. Joint families compared to nuclear families positively influence the psychological wellbeing of adolescence. This study also highlights that authoritative and permissive parenting styles are congenial to the psychological development of adolescents. The study concludes with suggestions for fostering positive family climates to enhance the psychological wellbeing of adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Family dynamics, Family climate, Family relationships, Family types, psychological wellbeing

### Introduction:

Family is considered a complex and integral institution that encompasses a wide range of roles, responsibilities, and values. Family is the cornerstone of society providing social support and integration. It gives an important context for learning and practicing healthy behaviours. Family members exert a profound influence on one another. In India, the family system is given ample importance due to its crucial role in promoting and transmitting the culture. It is both a social unit and a spiritual entity, playing

a critical role in preserving cultural identity, moral values, and religious practices. Family plays a key role in molding the behaviour, and shaping the character of individuals.

Family dynamics involve the patterns of interactions among family members and relatives. Family dynamics impact the wellbeing and development of individuals within the family. There are many factors influencing family dynamics including staying emotionally connected, establishing clear communication and mutuality, role reciprocity, and balancing flexibility and stability. Additionally, parenting styles and family structures play a crucial role, with supportive and nurturing parenting styles fostering positive dynamics, whereas demanding and neglectful approaches can decrease mental health and wellbeing of all members. Family dynamics are also influenced by factors such as disability, and financial hardship etc. If not managed well, they can lead to long-term dysfunction and emotional distress.

Family is a dynamic entity as there is a continuous shift in family patterns across the globe. There have been many changes in the family systems in India from past to present times. In previous generations, a joint family system was very prevalent, where all family members lived together under one roof and multiple generations helped raise the children. This system fostered a sense of unity, shared responsibilities, and mutual support. Due to exposure to global cultures, modernization, urbanization, economic changes, and shifts in social norms, the traditional joint families have been transformed into diverse forms such as nuclear, single-parent, and blended families especially in urban areas, due to economic and housing constraints leading to many changes in the lifestyles, behaviours, and habits of individuals. Transitioning from extended to nuclear families often leads to reduced contact with grandparents and extended relatives, which can deprive individuals of the valuable wisdom, support, and sense of identity these relationships offer. This impact is particularly felt during adolescence, a pivotal stage when individuals are on the cusp of adulthood, navigating numerous conflicts, questions, and dilemmas that require timely and proper guidance. With both parents working, and lack of exposure to varied social norms and perspectives, the adolescents at present may experience reduced parental attention, which can lead to feelings of neglect and impact their self-esteem and emotional health. Changing roles and expectations, especially in dual-income families or single-parent households, can sometimes lead to stress and anxiety, affecting overall family harmony. The family climate in modern times in contrast to ancient times is also characterized by increased individualism, technological influence, and changing parental roles. The challenge of balancing work and family life is more pronounced, with both parents often juggling professional responsibilities and household duties. Therefore, it is important to focus on various aspects of the family as they play a key role in promoting

wellbeing of individuals.

### **Need for the current study**

Out of all the stages of growth and development, adolescence period of life is a very crucial stage. This is the transition period between childhood and adulthood stages. In this stage, there is maximum growth and development in all aspects such as physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. It is a critical period for the development of self-identity, and self-awareness. In this period adolescents are seen to be distancing from parents and develop a dependence on peer groups which leads to confusing situations. It is a very crucial stage as there is a tendency to experiment with everything, join the wrong company, and also indulge in undesirable and wrong habits that affect their physical and mental health. Studies revealed that adolescents are the most vulnerable group of individuals to be impacted by stress. Adolescent girls tend to exhibit higher levels of maladaptation, eating disorders, and depression while boys exhibit aggression, and antisocial and indiscipline behaviours in response to stress. (Mental Health and Wellbeing of School Students Survey 2022, p.50) Research has reiterated that adolescence is the most critical period for getting initiated into substance use (World Drug Report, 2018 p.17). Globally, it is estimated that at least one in five adolescents face depression and are less interested in doing things (UNICEF 2021, p. 22). Adolescents are found to experience mental health problems such as mood disturbances, substance abuse, suicidal behavior, eating disorders, aggression, and violence. Despite facing many mental issues, adolescents do not easily disclose their problems to their parents and relatives as they believe that they will get upset and will not be sensitive to their concerns. The mental health challenges of adolescents need to be addressed as it is very crucial to promote their psychological wellbeing. Promoting psychological wellbeing includes development of traits such as satisfaction, resilience, autonomy, growth and development in physical and mental dimensions. Supporting adolescents' psychological wellbeing also contributes to their overall development, creating a foundation for them to become healthy, productive and competent adults. Family is an important agency to promote the psychological wellbeing of adolescents. Family environment with its open communication, positive home environment, and healthy relationships can aid in the positive psychological development of adolescents. The current study analyses the studies conducted on different aspects of family dynamics such as family climates, relationships within the families, family types, and parenting styles in promoting the psychological wellbeing of adolescents.

**Objectives of the study:**

- To explore how various family climates, family types, and parenting styles affect the psychological wellbeing of adolescents
- To emphasize the significance of family relationships in fostering sound mental health in adolescents
- To study the effect of family transitions on the psychological development of adolescents

**Family Climates and Psychological wellbeing of adolescents**

Family climate refers to the family context, encompassing factors like family support, warmth, control, and autonomy. A positive family climate is typically marked by supportive, nurturing, and respectful interactions, while a negative family climate might involve frequent conflicts, lack of communication, and emotional distance. Studies by various researchers have shown that family climates affect mental health and wellbeing. A study by Dixit and Sharma (2011, p.198-202) found notable differences in mental health and anxiety among students of favourable or unfavourable family climates. Phillips (2012, p.103-110) study also revealed that family climate and wellbeing are very much correlated with one another. Research by Gomez-Baya et. al. (2020, p.5902) stated that positive family environments play a crucial role in improving the life satisfaction of European adolescents. Additionally, Deepshikha and Bhanot, S. (2011, p.53–56) found that various factors significantly impact the socio-emotional and educational adjustment of adolescent girls. These factors include family cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active-recreational orientation, organization, and control. Many studies have also revealed that adolescents' wellbeing is greatly affected by their family's nurturing and caring abilities. It also concluded that a supportive and happy family unit is crucial for adolescents' mental health. Effective communication is more common among adolescents whose parents are warm and actively involved in their lives. Families characterized by warmth and cohesion, with low interpersonal conflict, are more successful in meeting children's physical and psychological needs compared to those with high conflict and disengagement.

**Family Relationships and psychological development of adolescents:**

Family relationships encompass various forms of interactions among family members, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended relatives. Family relations indicate the kind of bonding and attachment among the family members. A strong bond among the family members can lead to secure attachment,



promoting healthy development and emotional stability. Research on family relationships has demonstrated a significant link between family interactions and the mental health of adolescent girls (Sathyabama, B. and Eljo, J. 2014, p. 34). Positive parent-child relationships are found to be inversely related to delinquency (Vanassche, S. et al., 2013, p. 128-143). Furthermore, negative emotional expressiveness within the family has been found to predict higher levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents (Luebbe, A. M., & Bell, D. J. 2014, p. 897-911). Vandewater, E. A and Lansford, J.E(1998, p. 323–30) discovered that children from high-conflict families exhibit lower wellbeing. Bhat and Aminabhavi (2011, p.57-63) in their study found that adolescents subjected to high levels of control, social isolation, lack of privileges, and denial at home exhibit poorer problem-solving skills, decision-making abilities, emotional control, stress reduction, and overall psychosocial capability. According to Offer, S (2004, p. 26-41), families that spend more quality time together tend to have warmer relationships, which contribute to better psychological adjustment and enhanced academic performance of individuals.

#### **Family types and mental health of adolescents:**

The type of family in which an adolescent is raised can significantly affect their wellbeing, impacting their emotional, social, and psychological development. The study by Herke, M.et al., (2020, p. 6470) found that adolescents of single-parent reported health problems, chronic diseases, and poor quality of life. These individuals had lower mental wellbeing. Studies on divorced families and stepfamilies showed greater disagreement between mothers and adolescents. Demo and Acock(1996, p.457-488). Vanassche et al. (2013, p. 128-143) researched children from non-intact families who were found to be involved in criminal activities and even developed drinking habits. Also, conflicts interparental in nature are linked to delinquent behaviours among boys, and in girls, it led to alcohol abuse.

#### **Parenting styles and psychological outcomes of adolescents:**

Parenting styles can be broadly categorized into four main types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. Each approach uniquely influences children's development. The authoritative parenting style is characterized by high levels of responsiveness and demandingness, with a focus on supportive rather than harsh behaviours. Authoritative parents explain the reasoning behind rules, use reason and positive reinforcement, balance freedom with guidelines, and maintain open communication. In contrast, the authoritarian parenting style is marked by low responsiveness and high demandingness. These parents exhibit low trust and engagement, discourage open communication, and enforce strict control. Adolescents

from authoritarian families often found to have poor social skills, low self-esteem, and high levels of depression. Permissive parenting styles are indulgent and lenient, highly responsive to their children's needs and desires but provide few rules or guidelines, granting considerable freedom and avoiding confrontation, often acting more like friends than parents. Uninvolved parents are detached and indifferent, giving little attention, nurturing, or guidance, often emotionally distant and neglectful of their children's needs, meeting basic needs with minimal interaction.

Research has consistently shown that authoritative parenting promotes positive wellbeing in adolescents. A study by Tahir R, and Jabeen S (2022, p. 330-342) revealed that paternal authoritarian and maternal authoritative parenting is significantly correlated to psychological wellbeing. Another study by Francis, A., Pai, M. S., & Badagabettu, S. (2021, p.134-43) found a moderately positive relationship between psychological wellbeing and both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, while neglectful parenting was negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing. Adolescents with authoritative parents are less likely to exhibit externalizing behaviours and are specifically less prone to drug use compared to those with uninvolved parents.

### **Transitions in Family Structure and adolescents' behavioural patterns:**

Consistent parenting and a stable home environment contribute significantly to a child's sense of security. Having both parents present can offer balanced role models for gender roles and relationships. Rattay, P. et.al., (2018, p.1-19) revealed that adolescents living continuously with both biological parents generally enjoy good health, whereas those whose parents separated after the initial survey reported poorer health and a higher likelihood of smoking. According to Fomby, P., & Cherlin, A. J. (2007, p. 181-204) children who experience multiple changes in family structure may face worse developmental outcomes compared to those raised in stable, two-parent families, and potentially even worse than those in stable, single-parent families. Transitions from stepfamily to single-parent families were also linked to an increased risk of regular smoking. Lower health-related quality of life and higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems were observed in nearly all non-nuclear family structures.

### **Analysis and Conclusions:**

The review of previous studies has led to the following conclusions:

- Positive family climates characterized by cohesion, expressiveness, and support are associated with

better psychological functioning, while negative family climates marked by conflict and control are linked to adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and delinquency.

- Positive family relationships with strong bonds promote emotional stability and positive behaviour, while negative interactions and high-conflict environments lead to increased anxiety, depression, and poorer psychosocial skills.
- Non-nuclear families, particularly single-parent households, report poorer health outcomes, lower life satisfaction, and more mental health issues, with significant impacts on self-efficacy and increased delinquent behaviours. Divorced and stepfamilies lead to adverse emotional and behavioural outcomes.
- Authoritative and authoritarian parenting promote positive wellbeing and uninvolved parenting correlates with negative psychological outcomes and higher-risk behaviours.
- Multiple transitions in family structure lead to heightened developmental challenges, potentially leading to poorer outcomes compared to stable family environments.

### **Suggestions for Promoting psychological wellbeing:**

Families play a crucial role in promoting the psychological health of adolescents through various supportive and nurturing practices. They need to have open and honest communication, where adolescents feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment, which is fundamental. Providing consistent emotional support, acknowledging their emotions, and validating their experiences help adolescents feel secure and valued. Positive reinforcement, celebrating achievements, and offering constructive feedback build their self-esteem and confidence. Parents spending quality time together as a family, free from distractions, fosters bonding, and creates positive memories. Parents need to model healthy behaviours, maintain a positive attitude, and set a strong example for adolescents. They need to establish clear, reasonable expectations and boundaries while being flexible and supportive of adolescents growing independence. This will ensure a safe and predictable environment. Promoting healthy lifestyles, including regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and adequate sleep, is essential for promoting psychological wellbeing. Supporting academic efforts, recognizing pressures, encouraging social connections, and involvement in extracurricular activities further enhance adolescents' development. Parents with the assistance of school personnel through parent-teacher meetings, participating in school activities and events, by joint development of personalized support plans, and collaborating on mental

health initiatives of school and by creating a supportive network can ensure a consistently positive environment for adolescent growth and development and in turn their psychological wellbeing.

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## A Cultural Perspective on Social Status of Bodo Women in Agricultural Practice

Sibisuli Basumatary

### Abstract

*The social status of the Bodo women can be placed in a certain category in various aspects of cultural heritage along with the strategic agriculture of Bodo society. However, the Bodos have been able to identify themselves as an agrarian (farming) community by cultivating paddy in addition to other crops in a traditional way and their practiced social customs are also recognized as a part of agrarian culture too. The Bodo women also have to take the necessary responsibilities along with men, from picking seeds to harvesting paddy. Some of those activities have gained considerable cultural milieu. Thus, they are primarily involved in the social folk customs (i.e.; religion, social activity and folk beliefs) in working with agriculture.*

**Keywords:** Agricultural activity, Bodo Women, Social Status, Folk Ritual Custom.

### 1.1 Introduction

The Bodo community has been able to channelize the flow of their society until the present through the traditional methods based on nature in the cultural sphere. Although some of our folk customs have begun to fade in the milieu of current society, others have survived through modernization and post-modernization. Thus, the traditional farming's method or agricultural practice of the ancestral Bodos and the socio-cultural rituals associated with them still occupy a place in Bodo folklore. Like the various indigenous tribes of Assam, the Bodos have adopted agricultural practice as the main means of their livelihood. Using traditional technique, they cultivate horticultural crops like rice, vegetables, fruits and so on, based on the two season namely; monsoon and winter. Of these, mainly the rice cultivation has been being practiced them. Thus, a number of folk customs and festivals have also emerged from rice cultivation, which are signified as part of agrarian culture in the Bodo society. Generally, rice is stored and used as per the requirement. So, this cultivation plays a major role in supporting the shortage of food in our daily diet as well as domestic economic crisis. Hence, the process of building a

grain store (granary) for each Bodo family is found in material culture of the Bodos housing system. This is the gift from the ancestors which is mentioned by Rev. Sidney Endle in his book. According to him, "Each house, with its granary and other outbuildings, is surrounded by a ditch and fence, the latter usually made of *ekrá* reeds, jungle grass or split bamboo, &c." (Endle, 2012). In addition, the duties of Bodo women in various functional aspects of agricultural practice (especially rice production) are also noteworthy, and each of their activities are traditionally reflected in the Bodo folklore.

## 1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of this discussion are as follow:

- i) discuss the cultural aspects of Bodo women's participation in the activities related to the cultivation of crops.
- ii) efforts are being made to study the extent to which their social status has been reflected in these activities
- iii) through the Bodo women, an attempt is made to see how the agrarian culture of the Bodos has survived and what its social value is today.

## 1.3 Methodology

In this article, an attempt has been made to present a discussion based on descriptive method. Further the relevant data of this has been collected from both primary and secondary source. As a primary source, data are mostly collected from the Kachugaon region under the Gossaigaon sub-division of Kokrajhar district. Thus, the secondary data are gathered from a few the books written by various prominent authors on the subject of culture.

## 1.4 Discussion

The Bodos are mainly identified as the patrilineal ethnic group. According to the traditional concept of the Bodos, as in other ethnic groups, men play a prime role in the leadership of a family and society. But in comparison to the responsibility of managing many activities of



family and society, the Bodo women are not spared. However, they have led families their self-expertise skill by dedicating themselves to the family. Thus, the examples of their maintaining a special status in society, can be seen in some scenic activities by exhibiting the traditional knowledge, which are gained from their experience. They are equally involved with men in every aspect of farming, just like other sectors. If, we refer to the cultivation, then we can understand the matter of rice cultivation and this is the most commonly practiced by them. Traditionally, they worship to '**Bima Mainao**' or '**Lord Laxmi**' by believing her to be the mother of rice or paddy. As per our folk beliefs, the Goddess Laxmi takes care of her children and feeds the family by staying in the inner corner of the main house of Bodos (which is built on the north side). Thus, the responsibilities of running the household also fell on the shoulder of Bodo women. So, they were introduced in the society as the owners or forewoman of the entire family with the title '**Noni Maidang**' (goddess of house).

In the paddy fields, a lot of work that needs to be done during the monsoons season, from ploughing the field, sowing the seedling to harvesting the rice and putting it in the granary, can be discussed culturally. However, during the seven months (May to November), the lists of hectic activities are seen in every household of theirs. Notably, the main work of rice cultivation begins with the preparing the land for the sowing of paddy seeds. In this, the ploughman prays to the Goddess of soil and starts to plough longitudinally east and west at Kachugaon area of Gossaigaon Sub-division. It is also known to offer flowers and fruits arrangements at some other places before ploughings. However, at this time, it can see the social picture of theirs, sending rice to eat for ploughman, although there is no work for women here. This task can be done by either any female member of the family or maid. In the past period, the rich family took such servants (male and female) for the works of agricultural practice, rather than the household chores. But now the technology has replaced tradition, it would not be wrong to say that those social pictures are starting to disappear now.

In this way, when the seedlings become mature, the process of plucking and transplanting starts from the month of June to mid of August. In the agricultural sector, the tillage activity is for men and the plucking and transplanting of seedling is for women. But they perform equally by dividing the task until the rice is harvested and transported to the rice grains at home. After this, the responsibility of work that remains until the rice is polished and put in the granary,

falls on the men. Moreover, there are certain works that need to be done where only the roles of women are available. Among these, there are such activities that appears socially in two contexts as a matter of culture. These are mentioned below:

- ❖ The social activities of Bodo women in relating to folk custom (i.e., religion and beliefs).
- ❖ The social activities of Bodo women in relating to folk festival (i.e., Khathigasa Saonai Phwrbw and Domasi Phwrbw).

However, both types of social activities have been found to be correlated in the society, where the data were collected. Therefore, without taking any category in this discussion, only those activities related to agricultural practice, in which the Bodo women have shown their skills and have found a special place in the agrarian culture, have been discussed below:

#### **1.4.1 Gosa Lananai (Ceremony of First Plating of Seedling)**

The activity related to the social customs of Bodo women begin from the ceremony of firstly transplanting of seedling in agrarian culture. After ploughing the land for the rice transplanting, the head woman of the family plants a small taro at the east-north corner side of the boundary and then taking a small piece of bundle in her hand, she plants it near the planted taro tree in the ground of mentioned corner side. However, a small banana tree can also be seen planted in place of taro, in some areas of the districts such as Baksa and Udalguri. Both taro and bananas are a species of plants that easily grow on their trunks. In this way, the meaning of planting both these plants can be achieved by believing that the rice also grows quickly without spoilage.

#### **1.4.2 Nangal Jangkhra Janai (Celebration of Last Planting)**

The 'Nangal Jangkhra' is joyously celebrated by all families of Bodos on the day, when they complete their transplanting of paddy. It is equally attended by men as well as women and may be assisted by rural people. During this celebration, they consume liquor (rice beer) and meat at the paddy field. Furthermore, the women play with mud on each other. Sometimes other planter women may paint the landlord woman with mud and make her come to home

with mud on her back. Through such social pictures, it can feel to bring joy back in life by completing a busy task.

#### **1.4.3 Bakhri Gaikhonnai (Ceremony of Last Planting of Seedling)**

This activity is also passed on to the women. When the rice planting work has been done by other women, they leave a small blank place in the north-east corner side. The paddy seedling is transplanted in this area by only the head woman of the family in the next morning (it can be carried out only in the morning). It is performed on the days- Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Thus, the process of transplanting ends here.

#### **1.4.4 Mai Naihwinai Arw Khathi Gasa Saonai (Visiting and Lit the Lamp at the Paddy Field)**

This process of activity also occurs in women. The paddy field visit is associated with the 'Khathi Festival' or lit the lamp at the field. On the first day of the month of kartik, all the tribes of Assam celebrate with the name of Kati Bihu. This festival is also celebrated in the Bodo community by Bodo women. They celebrate the virtues of rice cultivation and perform such folk rituals of society in the name of Goddess Laxmi and Lord Kartik. On this day, the head woman of every family, after taking a bath, go to visit their paddy field before sunset. Then, without tying up their own hair, they also put a comb on their hair, and carry with them greased a 'gansa' or a 'sewari' (a kind of bamboo stick which is used in handlooms by them) with mustard oil. Also, they carry with them a pair of elephant apple fruit's petal, mustard oil, cotton to lit the lamp on the bamboo sieve. On reaching the place, they turn a circle to the paddy field from the north-east corner to the left side, by pushing the paddy leaf gently with the greased oil stick. In this way, they return to the starting point and they make a prayer for expressing their wish and desire to Lord Kartik. It is known as 'Mai Naihainai' (Paddy Visiting) in Bodo society. This is believed by Bodos to mean that the rice grains have become good quality by lengthening of the paddy panicle, and it can protect from the damage caused by the wind.

Then in the same corner spot, two stands are made to lit the lamp in the name of Lord Kartik and here one pair of elephant apple fruit's petal is used as the lamp. It is also named as ceremony of 'Gasa Saonai' or 'Khathi Pwrbw' by Bodos, like other tribes (especially in Assamese society). Just as the agrarian culture believes that the 'Bima Mainao' (Goddess Laxmi) is mother or owner of rice, 'Bima Bwiswmuthi' is mother of land, similarly, Lord Kartik is also worshiped in paddy fields by giving him a name as guardian of the crop. This way, again, they come home and lit the lamp in the cowsheds. Similarly, these women's activities are also reflected in the folklore of Bodo as a festival of agricultural life.

#### **1.4.5 Aag Lanai Eba Mainao Borainai (Welcoming Ceremony to Goddess Laxmi in the House)**

It means welcoming to Mother Laxmi at home from the paddy field. When the rice crop is ripened and ready for harvest, the head woman of every family does a ritual of social custom by cutting a tiny bundle of paddy plant and putting it in the main of north side or granary. This work can sometimes be performed by daughter or daughter-in-law of the family, depending on the inconvenience. They usually choose Monday and Thursday as the day to do this activity. On this day, the woman who performs the ritual takes a bath in the morning and lit a lamp in the Bathou and a specific corner area of kitchen. Then she goes to their paddy field with a white cloth over his head, carrying a glass of water, a new leaf of banana and a sickle (some even carried a cane). After reaching the field, by putting it on her head, she brings home three pieces of paddy plants, from the north-eastern corner side by sprinkling it with a glass of water, then cutting it together and wrapping or rolling it with a banana leaf. When she gets home, she washes her feet and puts them in the kitchen or granary. The woman cannot talk and smile with anyone when she performs this ritual. They believe that the goddess Laxmi runs or escapes when they talk or smile. Again, as per the belief of the Bodo society, whenever the paddy crop is prepared for the cultivation, the mother Laxmi stays at the crop filed. Therefore, it is believed that the existence of rice grain in the house increases two instead of one when she returns home after welcoming her. Soon after, the harvesting of rice began.

#### **1.4.6 Wngkham Gwrlwi Janai (Eating Ceremony of New Rice)**

After the rice is harvested, the Bodo families prepare a meal on a fixed date for all the villagers. This ceremony is usually held in every household during the month of 'Aghwn' (from mid-November to mid-December), which is recognized as a celebration of agrarian culture. The main reason for celebrating, this is to thank the Lord Siva and goddess Laxmi for the arrival of the new rice of the season as well as, giving happiness to the villagers. Here, as owner of the household, the Bodo women play a prime role in the worship of the deity.

#### **1.4.7 Bakhri Lirkhonnai Arw Domasi Phwrbw Phalinai (Closing Ceremony of Granary and Celebration of Domasi Festival)**

The social rituals of shutting down the granary are carried out by women only on the occasion of 'Domasi' festival. However, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month Magh, during the civil downtime, the female house holder woman takes a bath and puts a morsel of cow dung in her hand and draws a line around of the wall of the granary. This is called a closing ceremony of granary. So, subsequently, the Bodo people do not enter in granary. Then, they typically cook delicious traditional cuisine to feed the family embers such as pitha, laru, sithao and so on. This is called the celebration of the 'Domasi' in Bodo Society or 'Magh Bihu' in Assamese and 'Poush Sankranti' in Bengali societies. In this way, the traditional cuisine of Domasi, has also helped an opportunity to express the ability and traditional knowledge of Bodo women in the society.

#### **1.4.8 Bakhri Dangnai (Entering Ceremony of Granary)**

Entering of granary means entering inside granary to take out the paddy grains and dry it as the required quantity. During the Domasi or Magh Bihu festival, after closing down the granary by Bodo women, when they need to re-enter again, they follow some customs prevalent in their society. However, on that day, to enter in the granary, they should take a bath and enter there, again they worship goddess Laxmi by devoting an egg and a pair of betel leaf and betelnut. It can also be seen worshipping without offering eggs, as some of the women devote only with

flowers. After following this ritual, they enter and as per needed take out the paddy with basket to dry in the sun rays at the yard.

### 1.5 Findings and Conclusion

There are some findings, which have been found in the discussion of this topic. These include:

- Some activities required to be done in the of agricultural sector are related to hard work to get good results and some are related to social customs. Of these, hard work is the most common occurrence in men's activities. While, women's activities are increasingly associated with religious rituals and social practice.
- There is also the issue of local society and the individuality in intelligence of women in the work done in various aspects of their livelihood. This is because some activities or folk rituals performed by Bodo women in agrarian culture do not match from one place to another, and occasionally these activities may be carried out with the knowledge of their experience. So, there is no clear spell in performance of the religious rituals, where the deities are referred to by their intellectualism.
- In today's modern society, some social practice of Bodo's agrarian culture as become extinct, such as the Bodo cultivators have abandoned self-cultivation and instead provide work to others through contract basis (adi or jirathi). Furthermore, the influence of technology has made the young generation less inclined towards (reluctant to learn about) traditional farming methods and practice.
- There are also a few instances of folk beliefs in their society which try to place them to a little lower level. For example, it is believed that if the women returned to the paddy field after transplanting, the seedlings may be damaged. Furthermore, it was believed that the rats ate the paddy grain while the worm sit on the uwal (a wooden husking household). But now, such beliefs are slowly disappearing from our society, because women have to take up all the responsibilities as the head of the household in non-male household.

Thus, Bodo women can take such responsibilities as the owner of their family. This is why they can display their traditional knowledge in the field of various social activities as well

as agriculture. Therefore, women have to take the responsibility of doing the work that men do not get to do in an agrarian culture.

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## **The Politics of Territoriality in Manipur**

**Soihiamlung Dangmei**

*Abstract: Manipur is inhabited by different ethnic groups, and communities for centuries, developing it into a plural or multicultural society. The diversity of the state, in fact makes it look like into a miniature India. Despite the relatively peaceful co-existence of different communities in the state for centuries, the expanded formation of identity politics has largely accelerated after the formation of the state. The article delves into the contemporary challenges of territorial politics, and the changing contours of hill-valley relations in the state.*

**Key Word:** Territoriality, Politics of Ethnicity, Borderland, Article 371 (C)

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### **Introduction**

Despite the fact that Manipur was a princely state, proud of its history and culture, the advent of the modern liberal state marked the heralding of multiple identities struggling for self-determination in their territorially concentrated geographical areas. Different ethnic groups based on different ascriptive identities constantly sought for self-determination, and also for equitable recognition and power sharing arrangements, thereby posing a threat to the state territorial and administrative integrity. Territorial dimension of identity politics has also been increasingly manifested in the state. The idea of instrumentalism of ethnicity that propagated on the manipulation, and control of the politics of ethnicity for political and economic ends is increasingly manifested in the state.

Despite the fact that Manipur is inhabited by different groups in unity and peaceful co-existence since time immemorial, the arrival of the colonial rule promulgated the rise of ethnic politics and territorial claims. With the arrival of the colonial rule, Manipur lost her independence to the British in 1891 in the Anglo-Manipuri war, and became a princely

state under British India. On October 15<sup>th</sup> 1949 the princely state was merged into India as a Part C state, and on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972 Manipur became a full-fledged state. Despite the fact that the state is territorially consolidated under the Indian union, there is the existence of multiple ethnic identities that presupposes their own separate social space and territory. Manipur is inhabited by the Meiteis, Nagas, Kukis and Pangals (Meitei Muslim). There are other tribes, and smaller communities whose social and cultural space is separated from the Nagas and Kukis. The Meiteis constituted the majority, and therefore dominated the social, cultural and political identities of the state. The Nagas exclusive claims of their inhabited territory in the hills for creating greater Nagaland is perceived by the other communities as a project for the disintegration of Manipur.

The protectionist policy of the British administration towards the hill tribes from the Meiteis hegemony is continued in post-independent India. Therefore, under the Indian constitution, Article 371 (C) protected the hill areas of Manipur state from the non-tribals. The hill area of Manipur is protected by Article 371 (C) of the Indian Constitution in that non tribals are denied for settlement as well as from carrying out land transactions. Despite the fact that large portion of the land is situated in the hills, immigration from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and migration from Indian states concentrated in the valley of the state. Therefore, the Meiteis demanded for the implementation of the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS) in the state witnessing series of bandh and blockade that resulted in loss of lives, and destruction of public and private properties. The Meiteis agitation for the implementation of the ILPS resulted in the passage of the Manipur People's Bill on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2015 in the State Legislative Assembly. The bill has many implications for the tribal communities.

The Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill 2015 particularly is considered as an anti-tribal bill by the hill tribes in the state. The strong protests and agitations of the tribals to the state government led to the deaths of nine people, and burning down of the house of a tribal minister. The hill tribes asserted that the bill infringes the rights of the tribals, and that there is a potential of territorializing the hills by the Meiteis. Ngamjahao Kipgen argued that *"in the context of Manipur, the non-tribal Hindu Meiteis (valley dwellers) enjoy the upper-hand in the politics of the state as they constitute a dominant majority in population. Such dominant regime*

*constantly sought to consolidate its control over local resources, socio-economic and political realm has marginalized the hill-tribal communities. In recent times, such covert agendas often faced sustained opposition from hill people based on their awareness of the challenges to their ownership of resources. In the name of development, there have been consistent attempts for the alienation of tribal lands. For instance, the renewed attempt on the part of the Manipur state to pass the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960, is one such issue which has time and again reopened hostilities and resentment among different ethnic groups in the state” (Kipgen 2018: 112).*

Therefore, the bill was strongly opposed by the hill tribes, and largely by the Chin-Kuki communities. The bill was withheld by the Government of India as it was controversial. The fact of the matter is that the bill aimed at bringing some changes to the existing land related laws in the hills. The tribal communities feared that it would infringe upon their rights and land holding system, and amount to the territorialization of the hills. The Meiteis continued their agitation demanding for the implementation of the ILPS, sensitizing the issues with the tribal communities. The ILPS was finally extended to the state of Manipur on 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2019, on the same day that the Citizenship Amendment Bill was passed by the parliament, and ILPS came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2020.

### **The Hill-Valley Divide**

The hill-valley divide, or the division of the highlander and the valley dweller is a common phenomenon in South East Asia. North East India shared some of the cultural characteristics of South East Asian countries, as there is geographical proximity. The neighbouring countries such as Myanmar also experienced the hill-valley divide resulting into political turmoil. The existence of various ethnic communities in the state of Manipur, and the aspirations for a separate identity and state by the various communities has become a menace to the territorial integrity of the state. The hill-valley divide is primarily a cultural marker, rather than political imaginings. The Hinduization of the Meiteis in the valley is an important landmark. The Hinduized Meiteis in the past in a way considered the hill tribes as unclean, and marked off

from the past shared culture. The new Hindu identity of the Meities became a superior cultural and religious identity in the state.

The political dimension of the hill-valley divide was dormant in the past, and the cultural parameters has been largely responsible for the hill-valley divide. The hills were inhabited by different tribes, and often came into conflict among themselves. There were inter-tribal and inter-village feuds, and also intra-tribal conflict. The village polity or administration is the most important political institution of the hill tribes. Therefore, it is not the tribal affiliation, or clan affiliation, but the village polity that is the most important political institution of the hill tribes. The political imaginings of the Nagas, and Kukis as a people demanding for separate state and identity is a recent development in the political history of North East India. The political crisis was also deeply embedded in the cultural and religious divide.

However, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a political upheaval in most of the Asian and African countries. The struggle for independence from the colonial rule, and the demands of the various ethnic minorities, or national minorities for separate state or self-determination became a common political phenomenon in Asia and Africa. The political imaginings of the hill tribes, for a separate identity and territory became dominant by the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although, the Nagas and the Kukis shared the tribal affinity, and religious bond, as many of these tribes have converted to Christianity, still they demanded for their own separate identity and territory. Therefore, by the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political upheavals in the state considerably divided the various ethnic groups in the state, thereby accelerating identity politics, and demand for self-determination. The political upheaval is also largely the by-product of the global political crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Challenges of Territorial Politics**

The advent of the Westphalian model of nation-state is widely associated with the rise of territorial politics. Despite the development of the Westphalian model of nation-state as a sovereign state, territorial boundaries and territorial configuration of the nation-states are being constantly challenged either from the external forces or from within the state. The constant effort of the nation-state to consolidate themselves as a sovereign state also re-

affirmed that they are being challenged from the external forces, and also from within, from the national minorities or politics of ethnicity demanding their secession from the state. Defeat in wars, economic crisis, and neo-liberal reform can also lead to disintegration of state (Boone 2012: 4). On the other hand, the fluidity of territorial boundaries was manifested in Europe in the post-World war period. The disintegration of Russia served as a classic example. The fluidity of territorial boundaries is also experienced by the ethnic groups, as they are also being challenged by other ethnic groups in the same region, and also from the nation-state. Therefore, in order to sustain as a nation-state, and protect the territorial integrity, the ruling political class must constantly monitor the affairs of the state. Legitimacy and consent of the people from the diverse communities, in case of plural societies, are necessary for the sustenance of the nation-state.

Territory alone do not constitute a nation-state. The people having common origin or of shared culture who are territorially bounded constitute a nation-state. Therefore, territorial politics encompasses the social and political community, or as imagined communities as Benedict Anderson postulated. Luis Moreno and Nicola McEwen stated that *“the development of the state as a national state, or a nation-state, gave rise to the idea that the territorial boundaries of the polity also represent the boundaries of a nation or a people. The concept of nation is implicit in many of the characteristics of the state, including its territorial boundedness and the status of citizenship conferred on its members. The emotional force of nationhood, and the solidarity and mutual belonging it engenders, also serve political purposes”* (Moreno & McEwen 2005: 2). Therefore, territorial politics postulated the inclusion of social, cultural and political community of a geographical boundary. The premise of the post-colonial state is that nation-state preceded nationalism. In the European context, nationalism preceded the formation of nation-state. However, the politics of ethnicity largely subscribed to the primordial notion of nationalism. This does not necessarily mean that the politics of ethnicity do not subscribe to the modern notion of nation-state building.

The concept of land as a geographical space or a territorial space that exists prior to the formation of the nation-state is the defining parameters for the Nagas and Kukis. The community ownership of land among the Nagas implied that land and people are inseparable. However, the territorialization of the British and the post-colonial Indian state began to unfold

the changing realities and perception of the community ownership of land. The exclusive claim of ownership over territory by the Nagas and Kukis contradicted the objective of plural society in the state. Despite the granting of territorial and non-territorial autonomy in North East India, the idea of the Indian nation-state building is based on the policy of assimilation of the minority populations into the larger mainstream society. Therefore, the state contained the ethno-nationalism, and its demands for self-determination or independence, and do not want to set a precedence of granting self-determination to any of the ethno-national movement. The nation-state is the sole custodian of protecting its territory from within the state, and also from external aggression.

Liberal democratic states like India have been increasingly seeking to address the issue and rights of minority and ethnicity by granting certain rights and privileges without compromising the individual rights, and the integrity of the nation-state. The Indian nation-state also created several new states in the North East, and also territorial council like the Bodo Territorial Council, Sixth Scheduled, and autonomous district council in order to accommodate the different ethnic aspirations. Such arrangement seems to be *“inherently problematic given ethnically-mixed patterns of settlement within the region, which meant that however one drew the lines, ethno-national and political boundaries would never be congruent. In some cases, indeed, particular nationalities were so dispersed in terms of settlement that it would be hard to envisage that their demands might be satisfied to any degree at all by the territorial means”* (Smith 2013: 29).

Politics of ethnicity is a salient feature of plural societies, and conflict is an offshoot. Ethnicity and territoriality are complementary to one another. The politics of ethnicity is to secure the territories in which they inhabit. Most territories claimed by the ethnic groups such as the Nagas are either their ancestral land or are occupied in the historical and political process. The ultimate demand of the politics of ethnicity is self-determination or independence. However, states in the post-colonial period concentrated in the consolidation of territories in order to secure a strong nation-state, and therefore, mostly attempted to accommodate the ethnic groups by granting certain autonomy without compromising the territory. The role of the nation-state as entity to secure the borders of their territories is an important task for most of the post-colonial states. As a

result, territorial conflict and dispute often occurred with various ethnic groups as well as with the state. Monica Duffy Toft observed that *“controlling territory is of great importance both to ethnic groups and to states because both believe their survival depends on it. Nevertheless, they see the relationship between territorial control and survival differently. For ethnic groups, territory is often a defining attribute of a group’s identity, inseparable from its past and vital to its continued existence as a distinct group. States are defined by territorial borders, and tend to view challenges to those borders as threats to their very existence. The ways in which ethnic groups and states link their survival to territory largely influences whether disputes over territory end in a negotiated settlement, or instead in war”* (Toft 2001: 6).

The socialist state too sought to manage the problem of national minorities. David J. Smith argued that *“in the case of the USSR, the Soviet regime also sought to manage the multinational legacy of empire on a territorial basis. Guided by the maxim ‘national in form, socialist in content’, it allocated a designated homeland to each of the largest ethnic groups living within the Soviet state. However, this was not a democratic federalism, but the practice of an authoritarian one-party state, and its territorially-based approach could not accommodate the full spectrum of ethno-national diversity that existed within the borders of the USSR”* (Smith 2013: 30). Despite such arrangement, the Soviet approach could not contain the aspirations of the national minorities or ethnic groups within the state. In a largely concentrated areas of national minorities or ethnic group which are territorially contiguous, the demand for secession is rigour and intense, compared to the smaller and sparsely scattered territory of the national minorities or ethnic groups. The Nagas demanded the right to self-determination to the Government of India based on their contiguous territorial boundaries.

In such cases, the demand of the ethnic group is independence, and the liberal framework nor the socialist approach of accommodation is less likely to be viable. The nation-state on the other hand, is also equally strong in their stand to contain any secessionist movement. The extremity of approach largely has devastating effect on the ethnic group, and mostly are secluded in the periphery. However, in a highly globalized world, the participation of ethnic groups with the mainstream, and also at the global level is necessary for the promotion of their identity. Territorial politics continue to dominate the politics of ethnicity, and the ethno-

nationalists in the state. However, the non-territorial dimension of the politics of ethnicity is also increasing explored in the state by the civil society organizations, and the Government of India.

### **Ethnicity and Borderlands**

The Westphalian order of nation-state is also being challenged by the problem of trans-border or cross-border migration. The state of Manipur, being surrounded by international borders, is experiencing the issue of illegal immigration in the border areas. The Nagas and the Kukis in Manipur share their contiguous territories, and populations with their other groups in Myanmar. The immigration from the neighbouring countries in the last two decades is alarming as there is drastic demographic growth in the state. The intensity of the politics of ethnicity is increasingly manifested in the state. The intensification of cross-border illegal immigration is also responsible for the contestation of territorial politics in the state. The expansionist and sinister design of the politics of ethnicity is also increasingly manifested. In the European case, notwithstanding the challenges of cross-border immigration, there is cross-border framework or systems for cross-border co-operation. Cross-border illegal immigration has become a menace in North East India, as the territory is shared by international borders.

The North East share international border with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and China. The borderland of Manipur hills bordering Myanmar is less developed in terms of infrastructure, with rough and hilly geographical terrain, and deep forests making it almost an impossible task for the state control and policing (Shyamkishore 2021: 182). Despite the deployment of the Border Security Forces by the Indian-state in the border area, smuggling of drugs, poppy plantation, and indulging of illegal trade and activities continue to exist in a large scale. The Manipur state government declared war on drugs, and many poppy cultivations has been destroyed. The nexus of cultivators, and the drug cartel and their proximity with the 'Golden Triangle' has become a menace for the state, and the people.



The Nagas and Kukis has sizeable populations in Myanmar bordering the hills of Manipur. The demand for integration of their territorially concentrated inhabited areas bordering the hills of Manipur, and contiguous portion of Myanmar has been politically motivated for the Nagas and Kukis. The borderland in Myanmar is also a safe haven for various armed groups for many decades. There has been frequent military operation against the various armed groups by the Myanmar military junta. The military operation of junta followed by the atrocities committed towards the civilians in the border areas forced many border tribes to illegally immigrate to the border areas of Manipur hills. The illegal crossing of border in search of refuge for settlement in the surrounding hills of Manipur, and the illegal trade activities that includes smuggling of arms, and drugs in the border areas has created fear psychosis and tension to the people in the borderlands. There are no reliable sources, or official estimation of the number of volumes of trade, or trade related activities recorded despite being a hub of border trade, as most of the trades are of illegal (Nag 2021). Large quantity of drugs, arms and ammunition, gold, precious stones, and animal skin are being smuggled inside the border. The militarization of the borderland, and the changing demographic landscape has created ethnic tension in the border town of Moreh, as the town areas is inhabited by different ethnic communities of the state of Manipur as it is a designated place for border trade. The border town of Moreh is largely dominated by the Kuki-Chin communities as they constituted the majority in the borderland.

## **Conclusion**

The post-colonial states are mostly formed on the idea of consolidation of territories, and the indivisibility communities or groups. In a liberal framework, the state takes the rights of the individuals seriously with the objective of quashing the communal or ethnic groups divisive aspirations. However, there is a growing importance of the politics of ethnicity in most of the post-colonial states that was founded on the liberal framework. In the state of Manipur, the hill areas constituted by the Nagas and Kukis is granted with the autonomous district council, and is protected by Article 371 (C) of the Indian constitution. Non-tribals including the Meiteis are prohibited in the hill areas from settlement and also from carrying out any land

transactions. Despite such provisions of Indian state, the Nagas and Kukis continue to demand for self-determination by trying to control and secure their inhabited territories. The Meiteis on the other hand, opposed such demands, and also attempted to redefine land related laws in the state through the state legislative assembly. Therefore, the importance of securing and controlling of territory is increasing manifested in the state.

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## Historical Genesis of Handicrafts in Kashmir: an Overview

Sumiya Din and Saima Farhad

### Abstract

*The handicraft activities of Kashmir are renowned worldwide for their design, quality, and artistry. These handicrafts have a long and interesting history in the region, with the influence of talented craftsmen from Central Asia during the period of King Zain-ul-Abidin, also known as Badshah-the great king. During this time, craftsmen were invited from Central Asia and settled in Kashmir, spreading their skills and expertise. Later, during the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh and Maharaja Partap Singh, there was further encouragement and development of the handicraft sector in the state. Despite these positive developments, the handicraft sector suffered a setback during the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh due to the policy of replacing hand-made goods with machine-made goods. However, in the early 20th century, the handicraft industry of Jammu and Kashmir was revived. During this revival, the government recognized the employment potential of small-scale and cottage industries, leading to a focus on the development of the handicraft sector. The state of Jammu and Kashmir, known for its scenic beauty and bracing climate, is particularly suited for handicraft activities. The handicrafts of Jammu and Kashmir are not only economically significant but also culturally important, preserving and spreading the material wealth of the region's rich heritage.*

**Key Words:** *Handicrafts, Craftsmen, Handicraft Industry, Historical Genesis*

### Introduction

Handicrafts have a rich historical genesis in the region of Kashmir. The handicrafts of Kashmir can be attributed to the region's skilled artisans and their craftsmanship, which dates back to ancient times (Yang et al, 2018, p.28). These artisans are specialized in various crafts such as carpet weaving, papier-mâché, wood carving, and embroidery. The craftsmanship in Kashmir flourished under the patronage of various rulers and empires throughout history, including the Mughals and the Afghan Durrani Empire. The significance of these influences, particularly during Mughal rule, cannot be understated in the flourishing of Kashmiri handicrafts. During the Mughal rule, Kashmiri handicrafts gained significant recognition and flourished as they were favoured by the Mughal emperors, who established workshops and encouraged the development of intricate designs and techniques (Jha 2018, p.145). Additionally, the influx of Persian and Central Asian influences during this period further enriched the diversity and uniqueness of Kashmiri

handicrafts. This integration of traditional design elements with modern and contemporary influences played a crucial role in the development of Kashmiri handicrafts. These fusion products appealed to a wider audience and contributed to the growth of the handicraft industry. Throughout history, the handicraft industry in Kashmir has faced different challenges and transformations. These include the decline during British colonial rule, where the focus shifted towards industrialization and mass production. However, the traditional handicrafts of Kashmir managed to survive and adapt to changing times. Despite these challenges, the beauty and quality of Kashmiri handicrafts continued to captivate people both within and outside the region. In recent decades, the handicraft industry in Kashmir has faced new challenges due to political unrest and conflicts in the region. These challenges have affected the production, marketing, and export of Kashmiri handicrafts (Yang et al, 2018, p.29). However, the artisans and craftsmen of Kashmir have shown resilience and determination to preserve their cultural heritage. They have continued to pass down their skills and knowledge from generation to generation, ensuring the survival of traditional craft heritage in Kashmir.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a review-based research methodology, leveraging secondary sources like research articles, academic journals, theses, and newspapers to offer a comprehensive overview of the historical evolution and significance of handicrafts in Kashmir, spanning various epochs and socio-political contexts. The research involves systematic literature review and data synthesis, utilizing thematic and content analysis techniques to identify key themes, trends, and historical milestones related to Kashmiri handicrafts. The search for relevant literature encompasses academic databases, online repositories, library catalogues, and digital archives, utilizing keywords such as "Kashmir handicrafts history," "artisanal traditions in Kashmir," and "cultural heritage of Kashmir." Additionally, newspapers and media sources provide contemporary perspectives and insights into the current state of the handicraft industry in the region. The study concludes with a nuanced understanding of the historical context and cultural significance of Kashmiri handicrafts, shedding light on their enduring legacy and contemporary relevance.

## **Handicraft in the Context of Jammu & Kashmir**

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), situated at 33.45°N latitude and 76.24°E longitude, is often hailed as a paradise on earth, owing to its breath-taking natural beauty, verdant landscapes, and majestic snow-capped mountains. However, despite its allure, the region has been marred by long-standing armed conflict, political turmoil, isolation, economic backwardness, and a lack of industrial infrastructure. Nevertheless,

amidst these challenges, there are numerous positive aspects to highlight, including its picturesque landscapes, popular tourist destinations, the warm hospitality of its people, and notably, its rich artistic heritage and craftsmanship (Camelcraft 2012, p.1). One particularly intriguing aspect of J&K's handicrafts is that despite external influences, the region has excelled in art and culture on its own accord, rather than relying solely on outside sources. J&K has become renowned for its distinctive craftsmanship, particularly in producing high-quality carpets, shawls, papier-mâché, embroidery, woodwork, tilla work, sozni, and crewel, among others (Mir and Mir 2010, p.221). These crafts, rooted in local materials, traditional knowledge, and skilled labour, are highly sought after in both domestic and international markets for their artistic imagination, intricate designs, and practical utility (Planning Commission GOI 2012, p.197). Moreover, the region's natural endowments, including favourable climatic conditions, abundant natural resources, and a skilled labour force, have facilitated diverse craft production, meeting heavy demand in global markets.

The handicrafts industry holds a significant position within the economy of Jammu & Kashmir State, with its products earning global recognition for their intricate designs, skilled craftsmanship, and practical usefulness (Dar and Parrey 2013, p.21-22). The roots of the handicraft industry in Jammu & Kashmir can be traced back to around 300 A.D. The sector flourished under the patronage of figures like Shah-I-Hamadan during the reign of Qutab-Ud-Din in the late 13th century, and Sultan Zainul Aabideen (1420-1470 AD). Scholarly discourse on the handicraft sector in Jammu and Kashmir highlights its deep historical roots, with shawl weaving, in particular, being cited as a tradition dating back to the region's earliest human settlements. Kashmiri shawls have a rich historical background (Ames 1997, p.265), with their origins dating back centuries. Other prominent handicraft products, such as carpets, Pashmina shawls, paper-mache, feran, crewel, zari, Kani shawls, metalworks, wood crafts, and stone crafting, were introduced after the 13th century during the reign of Qutab-Ud-Din, the ruler of Kashmir. A significant figure in this historical narrative is Ameer-e-Kabeer Mir Sayid Ali Hamadani, who arrived in Kashmir during the medieval period with 700 individuals, including craftsmen and artisans of various skills from Central Asia. Despite their numbers, they integrated seamlessly into Kashmiri society, bringing with them the arts and crafts of Iran and establishing themselves in the region. This influx led to the introduction of several industries from Hamadan and Iran into Kashmir. When Sayed Ali Hamadani arrived in Kashmir from Central Asia, he found the shawl industry in a declining state. Alongside his mission to spread Islam throughout Kashmir, Hamadani also introduced various handicraft arts and crafts to the region. The revival of the handicraft industry was largely due to the enthusiastic support and patronage of Sultan Qutab-ud-

Din. Shah-I-Hamadan himself engaged in cap making for his livelihood, a profession that continued to thrive even after his arrival in Kashmir. Presently, this craft is still flourishing, providing sustenance to numerous craftsmen. Through his efforts, Shah-I-Hamadan transformed Kashmir into a "Minor Persia" (Iran-eSajheer), characterized by its vibrant industries and crafts. Consequently, the economy of Kashmir improved, along with the social conditions in the valley (Naseem 2003, p.92-94).

During the 14th century, Shah Hamadan arrived in Kashmir and introduced various arts and crafts, including carpet weaving, papier-mâché, and woodworking, amid severe challenges such as unemployment, poverty, war, and economic crises. Dr. Sir Mohd Iqbal noted that Shah Hamadan's influence extended beyond Islamization; he also brought prosperity, culture, and peace to Kashmir through his promotion of handicrafts (Shiekh 1976, p.37). Following Shah-I-Hamadan, Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen played a crucial role by providing royal patronage to the handicraft sector. Over a span of approximately one hundred years, these arts and crafts evolved into fully-fledged enterprises. Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen actively encouraged mechanics, artisans, and craftsmen from Iran, Turan, Turkistan, and Hindustan to settle in Kashmir, offering those promising prospects and concessions. Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen's support for various arts and crafts significantly contributed to the material advancement of his era and elevated its status. During Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen's reign (1420-1470 AD), handicraft products such as Pashmina shawls, carpets, Zari and Kani work, Crewel, Tapestry, woodcraft, steel and copper craftsmanship, stone crafts, paper mache, bookbinding, and pottery gained popularity (Saraf 1987, p.120). He fostered friendly relations with Shahrukh, the son of Sultan Temur, and Mirza Abu Sayeed, the ruler of Trans-Oxiana, while also benefiting Kashmiris immensely. Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen facilitated various facilities for master craftsmen from Samarkand and Bukhara, who migrated to Kashmir during his reign, promoting their skills among the local artisans. Furthermore, he facilitated the training of Kashmiris in bookbinding, paper mache, carpet weaving, and other crafts in Central Asia, thus revitalizing these industries in Jammu & Kashmir (Warikoo 1989, 199). While Adam Smith is widely recognized as the father of modern economics, Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen played a pivotal role in fostering economic development through his support for the handicraft industry. Similarly, Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen is widely recognized as the pioneer of modern handicraft in Jammu & Kashmir, credited for the continued prosperity of the sector through his efforts and humility. With the onset of Mughal rule from 1587 AD to 1752 AD, Kashmir emerged as a hub of handicraft production (Fazl 2011, p.97). Key handicrafts of Kashmir, including shawls, carpets, silk, paper, paper-mache, and carved wooden articles, were produced for commercial purposes during the Mughal era. Among these, the Kashmiri shawl stood out as the most significant, exported to various parts of India and

neighbouring countries. Although the industry had flourished earlier, it reached its pinnacle during the Mughal period, owing to the adoption of new techniques. Kashmir gained global renowned for its soft, warm, and intricately textured shawls. Notably, during this period, Srinagar alone housed over 24,000 looms dedicated to shawl production (George 1971, p.20). During the reigns of Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb, Kashmiri shawls were highly sought after and extensively used. Shahjahan, in particular, was a significant consumer of shawls and often sent them as gifts to rulers in Bijapur, Golconda, Rome, Egypt, and Iran (Ahad 1978, p.92). He also required large quantities of shawls and carpets for the construction of his new palaces (Pant 1978, p.201). Under Aurangzeb's rule, Kashmiri shawl production reached its peak and saw widespread exportation worldwide (Sarkar 1901, p.72). Similarly, carpets from Kashmir were esteemed as superior to those imported from Persia during the Mughal era (Mattoo 1988, p.25). Throughout this period, Kashmir produced a variety of rugs, namdas, and pile carpets, which were exported to South India, where they found eager markets among the Deccan rulers. The Mughal administration's robust organization of the handicraft industry facilitated large-scale production, not only for local consumption but also for export to various regions across India and neighbouring countries (Sofi 2015, p.76). This trade connectivity not only enhanced the socio-economic status of Kashmiri artisans but also elevated Kashmir's reputation worldwide for its exceptional art and craftsmanship.

### **Jammu and Kashmir Handicrafts: Ups and Downs**

In recent times, the handicraft sector has encountered numerous challenges, leading to the struggles of artisans and hindering their socio-economic advancement. The socio-economic status of handicraft artisans remains notably inferior compared to other sectors within our society. This industry grapples with various issues including low production levels, insufficient raw material supply, irregular access to materials, limited market infrastructure, waning interest among younger generations, and the integration of traditional and modern technologies. These multifaceted challenges pose significant threats to the survival of the handicraft sector in the foreseeable future if left unaddressed. The handicraft sector, the second-largest employment after agriculture, provides millions with employment opportunities. However, due to low incomes and dwindling demand for handicraft products, artisans are gradually transitioning to other sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, tourism, transportation, and various businesses. Consequently, the rich cultural heritage reflected in handicrafts is diminishing. Ignoring the current state of the sector could lead to future problems. Inadequate raw material supply poses a significant challenge, particularly in remote and hilly rural areas, causing production delays and impacting marketing, income, and employment.

Additionally, the younger generation, disenchanted with their parents' occupations in the handicraft sector, is increasingly seeking opportunities elsewhere, posing a threat to the sector's future viability. Furthermore, the current challenge confronting the handicraft sector is the inadequate provision of market facilities. Artisans often find themselves dissatisfied as they are not directly connected with customers, leading to discontentment due to the involvement of middlemen/agents who reap profits instead of the artisans. This issue stems from insufficient marketing infrastructure. Another significant obstacle faced by the handicraft sector today is modernization. With India's transition to an open economy following the end of the license raj system, increased competition among industrialists has emerged. However, the Indian handicraft sector encounters numerous hurdles amidst this competition, such as mechanization. As a result, many rural artisans in India, who produce handicrafts using traditional manual techniques, struggle financially. Handcrafted products are labour-intensive and time-consuming, leading to higher production costs compared to mechanized products. Consequently, pricing becomes a challenge, with handmade artisanal items often priced higher than their mechanical counterparts. The cooperative societies aimed at supporting artisans have encountered significant challenges and have not been particularly effective. These societies struggle with various issues in managing their operations, with their performance often hindered by government control. Decision-making authority within the cooperative societies is frequently limited, affecting their ability to address concerns related to raw materials, wages, employment opportunities, safety measures, and other welfare initiatives for artisans. Consequently, the organization of artisans into cooperative structures has only seen limited success in benefiting the intended recipients. Unfortunately, many of these societies are unable to provide consistent employment to artisans due to financial constraints and mismanagement, leading to a situation where a majority of artisans are compelled to abandon their craftwork (Arif 2017, p.19).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The discussion surrounding Jammu and Kashmir's handicraft industry presents a comprehensive view of its historical significance, contemporary challenges, and potential future trajectories. The region, often romanticized as "heaven on earth," is renowned for its breath taking natural landscapes and cultural richness. However, amidst its allure, Jammu and Kashmir have grappled with long-standing issues such as armed conflict, political instability, and economic backwardness. Despite these challenges, the region boasts a vibrant handicraft tradition that has flourished over centuries. The craftsmanship of Jammu and Kashmir is celebrated globally for its exquisite designs and functional utility, with artisans demonstrating



indigenous creativity and skill. The handicraft sector holds a significant place in the economy of Jammu and Kashmir, providing livelihoods to millions of people. Its origins can be traced back to ancient times, with notable contributions from figures like Shah-I-Hamadan and Sultan Zain-ul-Aabideen, who fostered its growth and prominence. The handicrafts of Jammu and Kashmir encompass a diverse range of products, including carpets, shawls, woodwork, and metal crafts, garnering international acclaim for their quality and craftsmanship. However, despite its illustrious past, the handicraft sector faces numerous challenges in the present day, including low production levels, inadequate raw material supply, and limited market access. The socio-economic condition of artisans is also a concern, with many facing low incomes and declining interest from the younger generation. To ensure the sectors continued vitality, concerted efforts are needed to address these challenges, including policy interventions, infrastructure improvements, and greater promotion of cultural heritage. In conclusion, while Jammu and Kashmir's handicraft industry faces obstacles, its resilience and cultural significance offer hope for its continued survival and prosperity through strategic intervention and appreciation of its rich tradition.

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# **Commentary Section**

**Exploring Self-Stigma Among Victims of Child Sexual Abuse: A Critical  
Analysis of Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder* and Mahesh  
Dattani's *Thirty Days in September***

**Isai Arasi T and Christina Rebecca. S**

**Abstract**

*Child sexual abuse is a highly distressing and traumatic incident, often accompanied by negative stereotypes and societal stigma. This study examines the phenomenon of self-stigma experienced by survivors and the subsequent consequences they face, as depicted in the plays *Getting Away with Murder* and *Thirty Days in September*. Self-stigma refers to the internalization of societal devaluation and stereotypes, leading to feelings of shame and self-blame. It worsens symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and affects various aspects of survivors' lives. To address self-stigma, survivors need to focus on rebuilding their self-esteem and resilience. Additionally, the support of family members plays a crucial role in motivating survivors to seek professional assistance from therapists.*

**Keywords:** Self-stigma, shame, self-blame, PTSD.

Child sexual abuse is an extremely distressing and traumatic event that can have enduring consequences for those who have experienced it. One notable aspect of this ordeal is the presence of stigma, which involves the assignment of devalued stereotypes. This notion is deeply rooted in the fields of sociology and psychology, shedding light on the complex dynamics of social perception and its influence on both individuals and groups. This theory, which gained popularity through the sociologist Erving Goffman's influential work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, presents a classic definition of stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting." Additionally, it proposes that individuals who bear stigmatization undergo a shift in their perception from being considered whole and ordinary to being seen as "tainted" and "discounted one(s)" (1963, 3).

The existence of social and self-stigma exacerbates the distress experienced by victims of child sexual abuse, rendering it difficult for them to openly discuss their traumatic experiences. Social stigma refers to the negative attitudes held by society towards abuse, whereas self-stigma involves the internalization of these attitudes. Addressing self-stigma poses a particular challenge, as it becomes deeply entrenched in individuals' self-perception and their societal roles. The present study aims to analyze self-stigma among victims of child sexual abuse, examining the characters Sonali in Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder* and Mala in Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*.

Mahesh Dattani and Dina Mehta, distinguished Indian Playwrights, explore the complex depths of human psychology and societal stigmatization in their powerful plays. While their plays delve into intricate family dynamics and the consequences of child sexual abuse, a recurring theme that stands out is the self-stigmatization endured by the survivors. By depicting the journeys of characters like Mala, raised by a divorced mother, and Sonali, brought up by a widowed mother, both of whom were victims of sexual abuse by their uncles during childhood, the playwrights adeptly illustrate the inner turmoil of these individuals wrestling with the weight of their previous traumas, frequently resulting in deep-seated self-doubt, shame, and social alienation.

Self-stigma refers to the acknowledgment of devaluation or stereotypes of oneself because of societal norms. Cooley's theory of the "looking glass self" (qtd. in Lucksted and Drapalski 2015, 99) proposes that an individual's self-perception is greatly shaped by their perception of how others view them, resulting in feelings of shame. The internalization of societal biases poses a challenge for marginalized groups, as it reinforces the belief that they are inherently flawed. The social cognitive model of self-stigma posits that individuals who internalize public stereotypes and biases experience a process of self-concordance, emphasizing the link between self-stigma and social stigma.

Self-stigma in survivors of child sexual abuse can arise due to societal misconceptions, victim-blaming attitudes, and lack of support. These negative beliefs can cause them to internalize responsibility for the abuse or feel undeserving of assistance. Finkelhor and Browne's (1985)

study, titled "The Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Conceptualisation," explores how survivors of child sexual abuse assimilate external influences as stigmatization. Stigma encompasses negative associations such as "shame" and "guilt," which are imposed upon the child, thereby influencing their "self-image." These negative meanings are communicated directly by the perpetrator, through pressure to maintain secrecy, and perpetuated by the attitudes of family and the community. The child may perceive the abusive activity as "deviant" or "taboo," particularly if reactions following disclosure involve shock, hysteria, or blame (qtd. in Kennedy and Prock 2016, 1-2).

Finkelhor and Browne's assertion regarding the negative impact of child sexual abuse being reinforced by both abusers and family members is illustrated in these two plays. In *Thirty Days in September*, Mala's uncle threatens her with the label of a "bad girl" if she discloses the abuse to her mother or others (Dattani 2010, 123). Similarly, in *Getting Away with Murder*, Sonali's uncle coerces her into "silence" and "submission," effectively suppressing her inner turmoil (Mehta 2000, 88). The perpetrators, along with the victims' mothers, contribute to silencing their voices, perpetuating the notion that speaking out is taboo. This traumatic incident becomes internalized, leading to feelings of shame. Candice Feiring and Lynn S. Taska's research article, "The Persistence of Shame Following Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Look at Risk and Recovery," emphasizes that "condemnation of the victim by the perpetrator and explicit threats to keep silence promote feelings of shame" (2005, 337).

Shame plays a significant role in the stigmatization of sexual conduct, particularly when it contradicts societal expectations. In societies that prioritize female modesty and chastity, individuals who have lost their virginity may face social stigma. For instance, Sonali and Mala perceive themselves as flawed, believing that they have failed to meet the "social and self-imposed standards" set by their community (Feiring and Taska 2005, 337). This sense of shame is characterized by feelings of inadequacy or being unlovable. Mala's uncle reinforces these beliefs by making her think that she is "ugly" and "good only for this" in reference to sex (Dattani 2010, 124). These damaging thoughts persist in her subconscious, leading her to feel ashamed of her own identity. She even believes that her father abandoned her because she is

not "more lovable" (Dattani 2010, 113). Similarly, in *Getting Away with Murder*, Sonali feels that she is undeserving of her mother's love.

The occurrence of child sexual abuse in a clandestine environment, coupled with the perpetrator's "condemnation of the victim" and the "societal taboos and legal sanctions against sexual acts of adults with children," contribute to the heightened probability of children feeling shame and self-blame for their involvement in child sexual abuse (Feiring et al. 2009, 3). In their article titled "When the Social Self Is Threatened: Shame, Physiology, and Health," Sally S. Dickerson, Tara L. Gruenewald, and Margaret E. Kemeny explore the concept that shame is primarily rooted in negative self-evaluation. This emotion is intertwined with "negative characterological self-related cognitions, and its motivational and behavioral correlates are indicative of a devalued or damaged self (e.g., submission, withdrawal)." Mala and Sonali experience this disturbing emotion making them feel "self-condemnation" and desire to hide their "damaged self" from others (2004, 1195).

Self-stigmatization exhibits thoughts of self-blame. The phenomenon of self-blame has been characterized as the internalization and cognitive experience of feeling responsible for the violence one has endured. In his article titled "Characterological Versus Behavioral Self-Blame: Inquiries into Depression and Rape," Ronnie Janoff-Bulman elucidates that "self-blame as a maladaptive psychological mechanism is generally related to harsh self-criticism and low evaluations of one's worth" (1979, 1799). It frequently arises from a tendency to attribute negative outcomes solely to personal flaws or inadequacies, disregarding external factors or circumstances that are beyond one's control. Individuals predisposed to self-blame may engage in negative self-talk, subjecting themselves to self-reproach for not meeting their own or others' expectations.

Sonali in *Getting Away with Murder* attributes the neglect and gender discrimination from her mother as the primary factors behind the mistreatment she faced at the hands of her uncle. This perspective reinforces her belief that being born female entails being subjected to "violence and servitude." Concurrently, Sonali internalizes the patriarchal ideas instilled by her mother, firmly convinced that "women's failure to bear a son is just retribution for misdeeds in her past

life" (Mehta 2000, 63). Sonali holds herself responsible for her incapacity to conceive a son, perceiving it because of wrongdoing in a previous life. Ronnie Janoff has termed this tendency to self-blame as "behavioral self-blame," where individuals attribute blame to past actions and consider themselves accountable for specific outcomes. This form of self-blame directs victims towards focusing on the "future and what they can do to avoid a recurrence of the negative outcome" (1979, 1800). In Sonali's case, she is determined to avoid having a daughter to shield her child from the abuse she endured.

In *Thirty Days in September*, Mala experiences a deep sense of self-blame, viewing herself as inherently flawed and evaluating her persona. She acknowledges her wrongdoing but feels guilty and deserving of blame. This form of self-blame is referred to as "characterological self-blame," whereby individuals hold themselves accountable for their intrinsic qualities and find fault in their character. Those who engage in characterological self-blame often dwell on the past, pondering what aspects of themselves led to the negative outcomes for which they blame themselves (1979, 1800). Mala internalizes her uncle's derogatory label of her as a "whore," firmly believing that she is solely responsible for the abuse she endures. She expresses feelings of guilt and self-blame, convinced that she brought the mistreatment upon herself. Mala firmly believes that "(i)t's not anybody's fault, except my own" (Dattani 2010, 89). This statement underscores Mala's belief in her own "deservingness" when it comes to the past experiences she has endured.

Individuals who have been subjected to child sexual abuse and are grappling with these sentiments of persistent inadequacy or unworthiness may suffer detrimental repercussions on their psychological well-being. The presence of self-stigma can exacerbate the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in survivors, as they may struggle to seek assistance and internalize detrimental beliefs about themselves. The severity of these symptoms can trigger the resurgence of fragmented memories and disrupt their tranquillity.

PTSD is often accompanied by hallucinations, which are illusions that appear real but are generated by the mind. In the case of Mala in *Thirty Days in September*, constantly feels the presence of her uncle, stating, "I see this man everywhere. I can never be free of him. I am not



so sure I want to be free of him. Even if I were, I am not sure whether I have the ability to love anyone ...else” (Dattani 2010, 134). Similarly, Sonali in *Getting Away with Murder* also experiences hallucinations of her uncle. She hears his voice and senses his breathing, as she reveals, “Every time I took a bath I could hear him outside ... breathing ... waiting to look at me without my clothes on ... (screaming) get away from my door ... get away or I’ll tell Anil you’re hounding me ...” (Mehta 2000, 66). These hallucinations keep the past incidents alive in the victims' minds, causing them to live in turmoil. Sonali describes it as the "worst thing" since it disrupts her tranquil life (Mehta 2000, 64).

Self-stigma has the potential to exacerbate hallucinations by instilling in individuals the belief that they possess personal defects or lack strength, subsequently impacting their self-esteem and inducing feelings of shame. This apprehension acts as a barrier to seeking assistance and heightens the probability of encountering judgment and discrimination, as observed in the case of Sonali and Mala.

In the play *Getting Away with Murder*, the character Sonali conceals a distressing secret that ultimately results in the development of multiple personality disorder. Sonali identifies herself as an eight-year-old girl and adjusts her voice to mimic that of a young child. By adopting the persona of this young girl, she effectively communicates the anguish of her tormented inner self, before transitioning back to her regular voice in a seamless continuum. Using a monologue, the playwright skilfully portrays the inner turmoil of Sonali's afflicted psyche. Similarly, Mala in *Thirty Days in September* also suffers from borderline personality disorder as a consequence of a traumatic incident. Mala exhibits fluctuations in mood and experiences uncertainty in self-perception. Her emotions oscillate between intense intimacy and aversion. Despite her deep affection for Deepak, Mala hesitates to pursue a future with him. In the realm of intimate relationships, she perceives him as an uncle figure, indicating her exclusive attraction to older men.

Overcoming the self-stigma associated with child sexual abuse is an arduous yet essential journey toward healing and self-acceptance. Victims must confront and challenge the negative stereotypes that society may impose upon them. Additionally, they must actively work towards

rebuilding their sense of self-worth and resilience. The role of the family in this process cannot be understated, as they play a pivotal role in assisting the victims in overcoming the self-stigma and trauma caused by sexual abuse. Family members should make concerted efforts to rebuild the trust that may have been shattered and reassure the victims that they are not at fault for their victimization. Moreover, the family must support the victims in seeking professional help from therapists or counsellors who can offer guidance, coping strategies, and the necessary tools to overcome self-stigma.

Anil, Sonali's husband, provides support to help her recover from the trauma by reassuring her that she is not to blame. He promises to stand by her side in any difficult situation and takes on the role of a therapist to help Sonali navigate through her emotional turmoil. Together, they work towards overcoming the stigma and Sonali decides against aborting the girl child. Similarly, in *Thirty Days in September*, Mala is receiving counselling but is hesitant to continue. Her boyfriend encourages her to persist with the therapy, offering his support to help her heal from the traumatic experience. Like Anil, he underscores to Mala that the maltreatment inflicted upon her by her uncle was not her responsibility and acted as a deterrent to her indulgence in self-harming conduct. With the backing of their respective families and cherished individuals, both Sonali and Mala endeavour to reconstruct their self-worth and fortitude.

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## The Matuas and the Relevance of Caste in Bengal

Paromita Sarkar

### Abstract

*In a society marked by caste division, democratic politics would definitely be influenced by caste identity. Most scholars opine that caste system which had emerged traditionally has now declined. But caste identity has gained significance especially when it comes to electoral politics. It can very well be said that caste today continues to exist as cultural communities detached from the caste system. Caste based politics made its mark in the Indian political scenario from the late 1970s. But in this regard West Bengal has been a unique case as caste has always remained in the margins of state politics. When the Trinomul Congress (TMC) came to power the Matuas gained political visibility, but thereafter if we look at the political scenario of Bengal there has been absence of caste mobilization in the electoral politics. In the 2009 Lok Sabha election when the Matua Mahasangha made its political presence felt, it was anticipated that this would mark the beginning of caste-based politics in Bengal but as it seems caste politics in Bengal has remained irrelevant and failed to have any real impact on organized politics of the state. In this article I wish to trace the political significance of the Matuas right from the colonial period to the present.*

During the Left regime (1977-2011) caste factor was never considered to be a significant driving force. West Bengal when compared with other major states of India has never witnessed any significant caste based political competition. West Bengal during the long period of the Left Front regime mainly witnessed the party promoting along the line of class, voicing for the working class. As a result, the caste factor never gained political relevance. This uniqueness is a matter of pride for the Bengali bhadralok. Discussions regarding caste is not considered civil in urban conversations. The “party society” encompassed all social identities. Divisions along the lines of caste, ethnicity and religion existed in rural Bengal but the parties tried to surpass them. (Bhattacharya 2011, 227-270) Even in the social sphere the state hardly dealt with major cases of caste violence as compared to other parts of India. Both CPI(M) and at present ruling

party TMC does not have a significant caste base or agenda. West Bengal never had any caste based political party, and can very well be regarded as an exception in this regard. It is not to say that caste discrimination or caste prejudices were nonexistent or has disappeared from the social realm. Especially we can have clear insights into the life of the lower castes of Bengal and the caste discriminations faced by them, if we read the writing of Dalit writers such as Manoranjan Byapari. But the fact remains that caste has not made any significant presence in the mainstream electoral politics of Bengal.

### **Reasons for absence of caste politics in Bengal**

Apparent absence of caste based political uprisings in the political sphere of West Bengal has been explained by a number of scholars. After partition, in post colonial Bengal, the hardships and atrocities faced by the refugees and partition victims became the prime focus and caste issues lost relevance in the political and public space. With the experience of communal clashes as an aftermath of partition, the Muslims actually became the main rival of the Namasudras instead of the caste Hindus. They now recognized themselves as Hindus as opposed to the Muslims. During that period religious division concealed caste divisions. Partha Chatterjee emphasizes on the predominance of the upper caste in the city which had an overarching influence over the rest of the state. He states that partition had a damaging effect on the Dalit movement. (Chatterjee 2012, 69-70) Post partition there was no single dominant caste that could gain political prominence and leadership positions in both ruling and opposition parties were taken up by the upper caste intelligentsia. Scholars are of the opinion that West Bengal exhibits “persistence of caste-based inequalities despite the disavowal of casteism”. The Dalits efficaciously accepted the unintentional upper caste dominance. They never resisted their domination. (Sen 2016, 103-124) So the subsiding of caste consciousness and political assertion in West Bengal can be contributed to the complicity and lack of opposition to the upper caste dominance by the lower castes. Dalit constituencies are also fragmented, and lack a collective agenda along caste lines. (Mondal 2021, 21-23) For example the Bagdis, Bauris and Chamars do not have any specific caste based political demand and prefer to flow with the mainstream politics of the state. Political parties in rural West Bengal overshadow categories such as caste, religion and ethnicity, which have much greater importance in other states of

India, thus leading to struggles for social justice. Political parties are like moral guardians often intervening in the private lives of people. (Bhattacharya 2009) Dwaipayan Sen on the other hand has stressed that upper caste domination in Bengal has been intentional and has highlighted on the reservation policies followed in Bengal. (Sen 2016) He insists that after independence both the Congress and the Communist Government recorded lowest percentage of lower caste reservation in Government posts. Upper caste domination was articulated based on continued violation of the provisions of the constitution. Praskanva Sinharoy is of the opinion that both the Congress and the Left Front had tried to project a secular public image, therefore sidelined caste as a category of relevance. (Sinharay 2012, 26-27) The then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in response to Mandal Commission said that in West Bengal, there exists only two castes – the rich and the poor. Symbols and popular icons helps to instill political and revolutionary thoughts in the minds of the people. Shiveshwar Kundu has rightly pointed out that just as caste is absent in the political domain, anti caste reformers like B.R Ambedkar and Jotirao Phule never gained popularity in West Bengal. (Kundu 2023, 19-22) This also reflects that Bengal has always been unwilling to provide a counter-narrative to the Hindutva identity and assert an effective identity based politics.

### **Mobilisation of the Matuas**

The Matua Dharma was started by Harichand Thakur , later it developed as an organization through his son Guruchand Thakur in 1931-32. The Matuas are a part of the sub caste Namasudras who were initially referred as Chandals and were considered untouchables. The partition struggles along with loss of habitat drifted the Namasudra movement astray and interrupted the political project of the Matuas. The Namasudra refugees after partition lost the ground to organize or articulate protest movements. At this time Prathama Ranjan Thakur a prominent Namasudra leader took the initiative of supporting the refugees. He set up Thakurnagar, the earliest Dalit refugee colony in India established by an independent Dalit enterprise. (Sekhar Bandyopadhyay 2016, 60-82) Later on Thakurnagar developed as a prime cultural center for the dalit refugees. P.R Thakur the first head of the organization selected by Guruchand Thakur took the responsibility to revivify the organization from 1949. But the organization had a lot of internal problems. Finally in 1986 the organization was renamed

Matua Mahasangha (MM). The MM has successfully integrated the scattered Namasudra refugees. It has steadily unified them and created a community identity. They have been reunited on the basis of caste and common histories of indignity, they had to endure as a marginalized section of the society. P.R Thakur emerged as the spiritual leader of the MM digressing from the path of organizing political agitations.

The Matua movement can be said to be the first organized Dalit resurgence in Bengal, it provided a new conceived space to a geographically dispersed and socially divergent community. The MM's main motive has been to project themselves as an autonomous sect that primarily challenges the Hindu caste system propagated by the Brahmins and rituals surrounding it. The organization has established and propagated a distinct set of rituals contrasting the Brahmanical beliefs. The Matuas practice these rituals in their daily lives to maintain their separate identity. Guruchand denounced worshipping deities, which he believed were popularized by the Brahmins with the sole purpose of establishing their supremacy and hegemony. So the Matuas do not worship any God or Goddess and renounce the rituals devised by the Brahmins. Because the Brahmins always tried to perform complicated rituals and deny people an understanding of the actual significance of religion. The MM is not a democratic organization and the leadership posts remain restricted to the Thakur family only and there is absolute centralization of power. The MM is mainly guided by the teachings of their gurus available in two texts namely Sree Sree Harileelamrita and Sree Sree Guruchand Charit.

Guruchand Thakur primarily emphasized upon seeking education, employment and building community spirit so that they can collectively confront the upper caste domination and secure a respectable place for themselves in the society. They also insisted on getting recognition as Namasudra in place of Chandal, which was deleted in the 1911 census. The Matuas regularly organize kirtans, jatras and festive gatherings to spread its faith and assemble more and more followers. After 1932 when the Namasudra movement gained ground there came a breach and it split into two halves. One section was under the Thakur family representing the educated elite and the other section constituted the poor peasants who were oblivious of the ongoing movement. This subaltern population under the leadership of Jogendranath Mandal and Birat Chandra Mandal joined B.R Ambedkar and Muslim League to confront the upper caste supremacy and control over the public life in Bengal. After the death of Guruchand Thakur in

1937 the Namasudras faced extreme communal threat and in desperation fled from eastern Bengal after partition. The Matuas settled in the border districts of Bengal and came to be labelled as migrants or refugees whose primary concern was survival rather than gaining political prominence. They also slowly adopted many elements of established Hinduism at the cost of its distinct identity.

### **Matua's participation in electoral politics**

Throughout the extensive period of staying in power the Left in West Bengal never emphasized on caste issues in mainstream politics but still they got the support of the lower castes probably because the Left Front implemented Operation Barga which mainly benefitted the lower castes. The political and developmental strategies of Left Front in order to maintain a pro poor image benefitted the intermediate castes along with the lower class and peasants. (Guha 2021, 50-56) In the 2009 general elections the MM projected that caste often determines local power equations especially in areas like Bagda, Bongaon and Gaighata. Both the Left Front and the TMC tried to pacify the Matuas. The Left Front furnished land for establishing Sri Sri Harichand-Guruchnd Research Foundation and the TMC modernized the Thakurnagar railway station and guaranteed them government employment. (Sinharay 2016, 147-168) Political involvement of MM in the 2011 assembly elections was seen as the reappearance of organized Dalit mobilisation in the post colonial political scenario of Bengal. From 1998-99 the Namasudra vote bank slowly moved away from the Left Front and the TMC was seen coming closer to the MM. Mamata Banerjee even publicly declared that she wished to embrace Matua Dharma. Caste based politics gained some leverage after the end of the Left Front rule in Bengal. Even though many scholars speculated that with the Trinomool Congress (TMC) coming to power there would be an assertion of identity based politics, but it could never make any significant inroads. The TMC gained the support of the MM and after its victory in the 2011 Assembly elections the CM, Mamata Banerjee declared Manjul Krishna Thakur, the Saha Sanghadhipati of MM as the minister of state for Refugee Rehabilitation and Relief. But with time the MM lost its prominence as the organization suffered from internal squabbles. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections Subrata Thakur contested with the BJP ticket against his Aunt and TMC candidate Mamatanala Devi. This very incident projected that there was a lack of unity



within the Matua or the Namasudra community. The leaders failed to mobilize the entire community in support of a single political party. It was evident that the Thakur family was divided on the issue of political alliance. The fact also remains that the MM does not represent the Namasudras as a whole.

At present the citizenship issue is of utmost importance to the MM. The Matua leaders feel that citizenship is as important as gaining social justice. Since many of them are refugees, they live with the continuous uncertainty of losing their land or job. So a section of the MM has started supporting the BJP because they feel that the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act would give them unconditional citizenship. The BJP has utilized the refugee-infiltrator narrative to influence the Namasudra votes by describing them as victimized Hindu refugees and branding the Muslims as outsiders.

This direct political participation of the MM is a significant departure, for a organization which categorically stated to be a non-political organization only committed to the social and spiritual well-being of the oppressed section of the society. This change of strategy is probably motivated by the issue of citizenship. (Bandyopadhyay 2013, 248)

## **Conclusion**

The fact remains that West Bengal has never witnessed any vigorous caste based movement outside the purview of Hindu religion. It is not to say that caste based discrimination is non-existent in the state but it works in such a subtle manner that it misses public and political attention. It is easier to situate caste in the socio cultural realm of Bengali society, rather in the political domain. Post partition the Matua leaders in Bengal lost political significance and relevance as they got caught up with the struggle for resettlement and caste issues receded to the background. In the present political scenario of West Bengal there is limited scope for the lower caste sections like the Matuas to carve out a separate identity in the political terrain and organize a sustained class based political assertion. There is high possibility that caste would continue to exist in Bengal, but limited to the periphery of the polity.

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**A Semantic analysis of Language Identity in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God***

**P. Praseeba and R. C. Sheila Royappa**

**Abstract**

*This paper delves into the intricate interplay of language identity within the literary works of Chinua Achebe, specifically focusing on two seminal novels, No Longer at Ease and Arrow of God. Achebe, a preeminent figure in African literature, is renowned for his poignant exploration of postcolonial themes, including the struggle for linguistic autonomy. Through a comprehensive semantic analysis, this study elucidates how language serves as a multifaceted tool in delineating cultural, social, and political identities within the contexts of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. By scrutinizing the lexical choices, linguistic codes, and translational dynamics, this paper uncovers the deliberate manipulation of English and indigenous languages as a means of resistance, negotiation, and assertion of agency. Furthermore, it unravels the nuanced evolution of language identity across both novels, shedding light on the evolving sociolinguistic landscape in Nigeria during the colonial and early postcolonial periods. This research not only advances our understanding of Achebe's literary craftsmanship but also provides valuable insights into the broader discourse of language politics and identity in postcolonial African literature.*

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Chinua Achebe, a towering figure in the realm of African literature, stands as a luminary whose works have transcended boundaries, illuminating the complexities of postcolonial African societies. Central to Achebe's narrative oeuvre is the examination of identity, an exploration imbued with the intricacies of language. In this paper, we embark on a semantic journey, probing the contours of language identity as manifested in two seminal novels by Achebe: *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. These works, set against the backdrop of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, serve as crucibles wherein the dialectics of linguistic affiliation and resistance are forged.

Achebe's literary endeavors resonate with a profound understanding of the power dynamics inherent in language, a theme that reverberates through his narratives. Through meticulous semantic scrutiny, we aim to unravel the nuanced tapestry of language identity, "He [Obi] would have to write his own letters in future. No more Mr. Green's English. He had been taught by his father's brother how to write such letters. But it was not the same as writing in Mr. Green's English. It was more like talking in a foreign language. He would think in English and then stop to translate each thought into the mother tongue." (Achebe, 1960, p. 53) dissecting the lexical choices, translational nuances, and codes employed by the characters in their quest for self-expression and cultural assertion. Moreover, this study endeavors to discern the evolutionary trajectory of language identity across the canvas of Achebe's narrative landscape, shedding light on the shifting sociolinguistic terrain that mirrors the seismic shifts within Nigerian society during the colonial and early postcolonial epochs. "Obi could not put a simple sentence together in his mother's tongue. But if his mother or an uncle or an aunt or any elder talked to him in the language he answered in his mind. It was just as well." (Achebe, 1960, p. 53)

Language is a dynamic and powerful force that permeates every facet of human society. Its significance extends far beyond mere communication; it serves as a profound marker of identity, reflecting cultural, social, and political affiliations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the complex historical context of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. This essay delves into the multifaceted role of language in shaping and delineating cultural, social, and political identities within this dynamic backdrop.

Language is the embodiment of a community's cultural heritage, encapsulating traditions, beliefs, and oral histories passed down through generations. In pre-colonial Nigeria, native languages were repositories of vast cultural riches, serving as conduits for the transmission of knowledge and societal values. Each ethnic group's language carried the nuances of their distinct worldviews, reflecting the diversity that characterized Nigeria's rich tapestry of cultures. With the advent of colonialism, this cultural tapestry faced challenges. Colonial powers imposed foreign languages, often English, as official languages, leading to the marginalization of native cultures. Native

languages were relegated to the periphery, resulting in a loss of cultural autonomy. This linguistic imposition marked a profound disruption in the organic evolution of cultural identities.

Language is a unifying force, forging connections within communities and fostering a sense of belonging. The shared linguistic backgrounds of individuals create bonds that extend beyond immediate familial ties. In pre-colonial Nigeria, linguistic unity was foundational to community cohesion, enabling collective action and shared understanding. However, linguistic disparities also played a role in creating sociolinguistic strata within Nigerian society. English, as the language of colonial administration, became associated with privilege and education. This led to divisions along linguistic lines, stratifying communities based on their access to English and reinforcing social hierarchies.

Moreover, urbanization and globalization have given rise to linguistic hybridity. In urban centers, a fusion of languages occurs, reflecting the interplay between global influences and local identities. This linguistic dynamism has profound implications for social interactions and group affiliations, blurring traditional boundaries and creating new modes of expression. Language, both in its imposition and reclamation, has been a crucial tool in the political arena. During colonial rule, language policies were wielded strategically to consolidate power. The imposition of English served to entrench colonial authority, creating linguistic hierarchies that reinforced existing power dynamics.

In the wake of independence, language assumed a central role in nationalist movements. Figures like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka harnessed the power of language to mobilize political support and articulate the aspirations of a newly independent Nigeria. "And then when Obika spoke, Ulu's voice spoke out. It was Ulu speaking. The same voice which he had heard all his life through a human voice and had loved without thinking. He had never thought of Ulu except as the giver of yams. But now he knew Ulu for the first time, not as a voice coming out of a faceless wall but as a power springing from the earth itself." (Achebe, 1964, p. 178) Native languages were elevated as symbols of resistance and assertion of national identity, challenging the legacy of colonial linguistic dominance. Post-independence, language policies in Nigeria became emblematic of the delicate balance between unity and diversity. The adoption of English as the

official language alongside recognition of indigenous languages reflected a pragmatic approach to governance. This policy sought to accommodate the linguistic diversity inherent in Nigeria, while also acknowledging the need for a lingua franca to facilitate national cohesion.

In colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, language emerges as a dynamic force that shapes cultural, social, and political identities. It serves as a repository of cultural heritage, a nexus of social interaction, and a tool of political agency. While the colonial legacy introduced complexities, the resilience of native languages and the strategic adoption of English reflect the adaptive nature of linguistic identities in Nigeria. Understanding this intricate interplay between language and identity is crucial in comprehending the evolving landscape of Nigerian society and its ongoing pursuit of unity amidst diversity.

Language is a powerful tool of expression, identity, and agency, particularly in contexts marked by colonialism and its aftermath. In the crucible of colonial and postcolonial struggles, deliberate manipulation of both English and indigenous languages emerged as a strategic means of resistance, negotiation, and assertion of agency. This essay delves into the nuanced ways in which language was wielded as a weapon, illuminating the profound impact it had on shaping sociopolitical landscapes. In colonial Nigeria, language became a contested terrain. The imposition of English as the official language was accompanied by attempts to diminish the significance of indigenous languages. However, this linguistic hegemony was met with resistance. Native speakers strategically wielded English, subverting its intended purpose to express their own narratives, aspirations, and critiques of colonial rule. Through subversive linguistic practices, individuals and communities covertly communicated dissent and rallied against oppressive policies. Simultaneously, indigenous languages were transformed into instruments of resistance. These languages became repositories of subversive messages, allowing communities to communicate covertly without the scrutiny of colonial authorities. Indigenous tongues evolved into conduits for organizing, mobilizing, and transmitting resistance narratives, enabling communities to maintain cohesion and solidarity in the face of external pressures.

As colonialism gave way to post colonialism, the linguistic landscape continued to evolve. Communities engaged in complex acts of negotiation, employing code-switching as a means of

navigating the intricacies of linguistic power dynamics. This practice allowed for the fusion of English and indigenous languages, enabling individuals to straddle multiple linguistic worlds. Code-switching became a survival strategy, enabling individuals to maintain their cultural identities while adapting to the realities of a postcolonial society. The deliberate manipulation of language facilitated the emergence of hybrid identities, wherein individuals integrated elements from both English and indigenous linguistic and cultural frameworks. This synthesis not only enabled a renegotiation of identity but also fostered a sense of resilience and adaptability in the face of changing sociopolitical landscapes. Hybrid identities became emblematic of the dynamism and adaptability of communities in their pursuit of agency and self-determination.

In the postcolonial era, deliberate manipulation of language extended beyond resistance and negotiation; it became a vehicle for asserting agency and reclaiming cultural autonomy. Indigenous languages, once marginalized, were revitalized as mediums of cultural expression, strengthening communal bonds and affirming the enduring significance of cultural heritage. Language also played a pivotal role in advocacy and representation within the political sphere. Leaders and activists harnessed the power of language to articulate the aspirations of their communities, mobilize support, and demand social and political change. Through eloquent and impassioned linguistic expression, individuals asserted their agency, challenging established power structures and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society.

The deliberate manipulation of both English and indigenous languages as instruments of resistance, negotiation, and agency in colonial and postcolonial contexts reflects the profound adaptability and resilience of communities facing sociopolitical upheaval. Language, far from being a static medium, emerges as a dynamic force that shapes and is shaped by the complex interplay of power, identity, and agency. Understanding this intricate relationship between language and sociopolitical dynamics is crucial in unraveling the multifaceted narratives of resistance, negotiation, and assertion that define colonial and postcolonial histories.

Chinua Achebe's novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* serve as literary mirrors reflecting the intricate interplay of language identity amidst the shifting sociolinguistic landscapes of colonial and early postcolonial Nigeria. Through a comprehensive exploration, this essay aims to unravel

the nuanced evolution of language identity across both novels, shedding light on the dynamic sociolinguistic transformations that characterized this pivotal period in Nigerian history. "For Ulu himself had now come out of Obika's mouth and was walking about in the world like any other man. And there was no other god. Ulu alone was now god. He must be worshipped and obeyed in his new manifestation. This was a truth that now gripped him with the same fervor with which the other one had taken him unawares." (Achebe, 1964, p. 179)

In both novels, English emerges as a symbol of colonial authority. It is the language of administration, education, and governance. The characters' interactions with English reflect a complex relationship: a simultaneous recognition of its power and a lingering dissonance rooted in its colonial legacy. Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* embodies this dichotomy, as he grapples with the expectations tied to English proficiency while navigating the weight of cultural heritage. Simultaneously, Achebe portrays the erosion of indigenous languages as a consequence of colonial dominance. This erosion is evident in the diminishing usage of native tongues in official contexts and the devaluation of traditional oral storytelling. However, Achebe also captures moments of linguistic resilience, where characters deliberately engage in conversations in their native languages, signaling a subtle resistance to the encroachment of English.

The novels delve into how language serves as a vehicle for cultural expression. In *Arrow of God* the portrayal of the Igbo oracle, Ulu, and the priest, Ezeulu, hinges on the linguistic and cultural rituals that underpin their roles. Similarly, in "No Longer at Ease," the clash between traditional Igbo values and Western legal systems is starkly embodied in the language used during Obi's trial. As colonialism recedes and Nigeria transitions into independence, Achebe introduces characters whose language identities reflect the evolving sociolinguistic landscape. For instance, Obi's niece, Anwulika, represents a new generation straddling the complexities of indigenous and English-speaking worlds. Her fluency in English does not negate her cultural allegiance; instead, it augments her ability to navigate the shifting terrains of identity.

Achebe's novels provide insight into the early postcolonial period, marked by a deliberate effort to forge a linguistic equilibrium. The recognition of English alongside indigenous languages as official languages reflects the nation's commitment to acknowledging its linguistic diversity while



providing a unifying medium for communication. The novels subtly convey the stratification that emerges within postcolonial Nigerian society based on linguistic proficiency. English proficiency becomes a marker of social mobility, opening doors to educational and professional opportunities. This linguistic stratification introduces a new layer of complexity to identity formation.

Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* provide a rich tapestry of language identity evolution, offering profound insights into the sociolinguistic shifts that defined colonial and early postcolonial Nigeria. Through meticulously crafted characters and nuanced narrative techniques, Achebe navigates the complexities of linguistic agency, cultural preservation, and identity negotiation. The novels serve as literary time capsules, allowing readers to traverse the linguistic landscapes of a pivotal era, ultimately underscoring the enduring power of language in shaping individual and collective identities.

Language, as a medium of communication, is intricately woven into the fabric of identity. In postcolonial Africa, the complex interplay between language, politics, and identity emerges as a central theme in literature. This essay delves into the multifaceted relationship between language politics and identity in postcolonial African literature, exploring how writers grapple with linguistic legacies, negotiate cultural affiliations, and assert agency through their narrative voices. Powers imposed their languages on African territories, wielding them as instruments of control. English, French, Portuguese, and other colonial languages became the dominant mediums of administration, education, and governance. This linguistic imposition had profound implications for the cultural and linguistic identities of African communities, creating a dichotomy between the official language of power and the indigenous languages of heritage. As colonial languages took precedence, indigenous languages faced marginalization. They were relegated to informal settings, oral traditions, and local contexts. This linguistic hierarchy not only disrupted the organic evolution of native languages but also contributed to a sense of cultural dissonance among Africans, who found themselves straddling multiple linguistic worlds.

Postcolonial African literature often grapples with the complexities of linguistic negotiation. Writers employ code-switching and linguistic hybridity to reflect the multilayered identities of

their characters. This literary technique mirrors the lived experiences of individuals who navigate the fluid boundaries between colonial languages and indigenous tongues, demonstrating the adaptability and resilience of African identities. Language politics also intersect with broader cultural negotiations. African writers employ language as a vehicle to explore the syncretism of cultures, where traditional beliefs, practices, and cosmologies coexist with modernity and foreign influences. Through linguistic choices, authors depict the dynamic fusion of cultural elements, illustrating the evolving nature of African identities.

African writers play a pivotal role in the revitalization of indigenous languages. Through their works, they infuse native tongues with new vitality, affirming their cultural significance. Writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocate for linguistic decolonization, urging a return to native languages as a means of reclaiming cultural agency and asserting African identity. Language becomes a potent tool of political resistance in postcolonial African literature. Writers deploy their narrative voices to critique oppressive regimes, challenge linguistic hierarchies, and advocate for linguistic inclusivity. Through their literary works, they amplify the voices of marginalized communities, galvanizing movements for social justice and political change.

Postcolonial African literature serves as a powerful testament to the intricate relationship between language politics and identity. Through their narratives, African writers navigate the complex terrain of linguistic legacies, cultural negotiations, and assertions of agency. They illuminate the resilience and adaptability of African identities in the face of linguistic challenges, underscoring the enduring power of language in shaping individual and collective selfhood. Ultimately, postcolonial African literature stands as a vibrant testament to the indomitable spirit of African communities in their quest for linguistic and cultural autonomy.

In the exploration of Chinua Achebe's masterful novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* it becomes strikingly evident that language is far more than a mere vessel of communication. It emerges as a dynamic force, intricately woven into the very fabric of cultural, social, and political

identities within the complex tapestry of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. Through meticulous semantic analysis, we have witnessed how characters deftly wield English and indigenous languages, forging pathways of resistance, negotiation, and assertion of agency. In "No Longer at Ease," we encountered Obi Okonkwo, whose linguistic journey mirrors the broader societal struggle. His adeptness in English, a tool bestowed with colonial authority, is both a key to his professional ascent and a tether to his cultural roots. Achebe masterfully navigates the nuances of Obi's linguistic identity, illustrating the intricate dance between adherence to the colonial system and the yearning to preserve his Igbo heritage. This dichotomy mirrors the broader cultural milieu, where language embodies the tension between tradition and modernity.

Similarly, in *Arrow of God* Achebe immerses us in the realm of Ezeulu, the high priest of Ulu, whose identity is inextricably bound to the language and rituals of his people. The novel weaves a rich tapestry of linguistic traditions, revealing how indigenous languages serve as vessels of cultural continuity and spiritual significance. Through Ezeulu, Achebe emphasizes the profound symbiosis between language and religious identity, underscoring how the fate of a culture is intricately tied to the preservation of its linguistic heritage. As we traverse these narrative landscapes, it becomes evident that language is not a static entity, but a living, breathing testament to the adaptability and resilience of individuals and communities. The deliberate manipulation of language, whether in resistance to colonial impositions or in the negotiation of evolving sociolinguistic landscapes, is a testament to the agency inherent in linguistic choices. Through their linguistic agency, Achebe's characters transcend mere words; they become agents of cultural preservation, social negotiation, and political assertion.

In the broader context of postcolonial discourse, Achebe's novels offer invaluable insights into the enduring legacy of language politics and identity in Nigeria. They stand as literary testaments to the profound impact of linguistic choices on the formation and reformation of identities in a society marked by colonial legacies. Through meticulous semantic analysis, we have unraveled the intricate interplay between language and identity, shedding light on the dynamic forces that shape

the lives of Achebe's characters. In conclusion, Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* serve as literary crucibles wherein the semantic complexities of language identity are forged. Through the deliberate manipulation of English and indigenous languages, Achebe's characters navigate the intricate terrain of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, asserting their agency and preserving their cultural heritage. In doing so, they illuminate the enduring power of language as a multifaceted tool in the delineation of cultural, social, and political identities. The resonance of Achebe's exploration extends far beyond the pages of his novels, providing us with invaluable insights into the broader discourse of language politics and identity in postcolonial African literature.

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## Contribution of Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal in the Development of Sundarbans

Rini Mandal and Jayanta Mete

### Abstract

*Tushar Kanjilal, the 'Mastermoshai' of Sundarbans had not confined his knowledge just within the four walls of Rangabelia High School but rather expanded it for the overall development of the people residing in Sundarbans. He had acted as a bridge, which connected the rural people of Sundarbans islands with the rest of the world. Along with Tushar Kanjilal, his wife, Bina Kanjilal also worked for the development of people. She contributed immensely towards the empowerment of women and helped them to come out of the vicious circle of social evils. Though both Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal are no longer with us, the people of Sundarbans are still thriving by following their paths. The paper followed a Qualitative Research Methodology. Data are gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The paper attempted to know the roles of Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal in the lives of the people and the development of Sundarbans.*

**Keywords:** Tushar Kanjilal, Bina Kanjilal, Sundarbans, Rangabelia, Tagore Society for Rural Development

### Introduction

Tushar Kanjilal, who was fondly known as the 'Mastermoshai' in Sundarbans (Jalais 2004, 3) was considered an epitome of hope for the people there. He had devoted over 30 years of his life to the overall development and empowerment of the isolated rural areas of the islands of Sundarbans. He was not only a social worker, political activist, writer and headmaster of Rangabelia High School but also an active environmentalist, who took many steps to save the Mangroves of Sundarbans (Mukhopadhyay 2003, 157; Ganguly 2020).

Tushar Kanjilal was born in Noakhali (present-day Bangladesh) in the year 1935. His family migrated to Hooghly district of West Bengal in 1946, just before Indian independence. From a very young age, he was engrossed with Marxist ideologies but, in 1967 he left active politics and focused on the development of Sundarbans. Although, he began his teaching profession at Baghajatin Boys' High School but soon shifted to Rangabelia High School (Saha 2020), situated in a small hamlet of Sundarbans Delta. He was so moved by witnessing the condition of the poor people of Sundarbans that he decided to stay there and took his wife, Bina Kanjilal and three children there as well (Mukhopadhyay 2003, 158; News 18 2020). Later on, Bina Kanjilal also devoted herself to the development and empowerment of the women of Sundarbans.

Tushar Kanjilal established a basic social service organisation there, which in 1969 merged with the Tagore Society for Rural Development. The organisation promoted women's empowerment, ecological development, comprehensive health care, adult education, and early childhood education, among other things (Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation 2008). In addition to concentrating on the proper use of technology in the inaccessible areas of Sundarbans, Tushar Kanjilal also tried to get the support of many governmental and non-governmental agencies for the development of the land (Mukhopadhyay 2003, 161).

Several awards and prizes have been given to Tushar Kanjilal in acknowledgement of his achievements and services. He was declared a National Teacher in 1984, and the 1985 Man of the Year for *The Week* magazine. He was bestowed with the Padma Shri Award in 1996 and also received an Award from the Institution of Engineers (India), Rural Development Forum, in 1991. In 2006, he was awarded the 'Rathindranath Puroshkar' by Viswa-Bharati University, and he also received the "Indian Living Legend" award from Voluntary Action Network India, Delhi. His name was included in the Penguin publication entitled *Prophets of Modern India* in 2004 (Barua 2019; Basu 2020; Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation 2008; News 18 2020; Saha 2020).

### **Purpose**

1. To know the role of Tushar Kanjilal in the lives of the people and the overall development of Sundarbans.
2. To know the role of Bina Kanjilal in the lives of the people of Sundarbans.

## **Methodology**

### *Research design*

The paper followed the Narrative analysis research design of Qualitative Research Methodology. To gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the central phenomenon of the life and story of Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal, the researchers have selected this design.

### *Site and Sample Selection*

The study is based on the area of Sundarbans. The purposive sampling technique was used by the researchers to select the participant (sample) for primary data collection.

### *Data Collection Methods*

Data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. For the collection of primary data, the telephonic interview method has been adopted by the researchers. Data was collected through the open-ended, unstructured interview process. Researchers interviewed the participant of the study, Mr Avijit Bagchi, the accountant of Rangabelia Mahila Samiti, with his consent and by providing proper information about the purpose of the study. Secondary data were gathered by analysing different journals, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, government websites and documents, etc.

### *Credibility of the Data*

To ensure the credibility (validity) of the data, the data triangulation method was used and the researchers found that data from both sources (primary and secondary) confirmed each other.

## **Role of Tushar Kanjilal**

‘Mastermoshai’s’ role in the lives of Sundarbans was not only limited to educational development but it expanded to various spheres. He tried to develop Sundarbans in every possible way. When he started teaching at Rangabelia High School, he observed various problems faced by people in their everyday lives due to frequent storms and cyclones, flooding of agricultural lands with saline water, soil erosion, lack of drinking water, lack of healthcare and transport facilities, attacks of various animals including the royal Bengal, etc. besides



poverty (Mr. Bagchi). So, Tushar Kanjilal conducted various household surveys, talked to people to know their problems, and tried to solve them (Mukhopadhyay 2003, 75; Samanta et al. 2021, 2). His role in the development of Sundarbans and in the lives of people are discussed below:

***a. Role of Tushar Kanjilal in Educational Development***

One day in his school, a student fainted due to weakness. When the boy regained consciousness, he said that he had not eaten anything for the last three days (Bandyopadhyay 2000, 3925). Mr. Avijit Bagchi also stated, “Tushar Kanjilal often asked his students what they have eaten before coming to school, to which most of the students replied that they have not eaten anything and some also said that they have not eaten for two or three days”. With these, Tushar Kanjilal understood that the first and foremost problem of the people there was poverty and low-income sources. These prompted him to establish the Rangabelia project for social and economic welfare (Bandyopadhyay 2000, 3925; Mukhopadhyay 2003, 158) and “he also tried to feed the children coming to school” (Mr. Bagchi).

“With the Tagore foundation, Tushar Kanjilal also built some non-formal, night schools where Mr. Tushar, his wife (Mrs. Bina Kanjilal) and a few other people used to teach the women and adults of Sundarbans. Though these schools have no existence now, but Rangabelia Tagore Foundation still run two schools for children belonging to very distressed and poor families in the remote areas of Sundarbans, e.g. Dayapur and Luxbagan”, said Mr. Bagchi.

***b. Role of Tushar Kanjilal in the Agricultural Development of Sundarbans***

Sundarbans is one of the country's most economically and socially backward regions (Bandyopadhyay 2000, 3925; Samanta et al. 2021, 1). People there mostly depend on agriculture besides doing some other work like honey collection, fishing, woodcutting, boating, poultry farming, etc. The agricultural lands of Sundarbans were mostly mono-crop lands (Kanjilal et al. 2010, 5; Mozumder et al. 2018, 42; Sen and Pattanaik 2017, 867), which created a great problem for farmers as they could harvest only once a year. To remove this difficulty, Tushar Kanjilal along with Tagore Foundation established a soil testing lab at Rangabelia, to make the lands capable of producing two or three crops in a year” (Mr. Bagchi). This initiative helped to tackle the farming and economic problems of Sundarbans to a certain extent.

*c. Role of Tushar Kanjilal in the Development of Healthcare Facilities*

The people of Sundarbans were facing numerous problems due to the scarcity of medical and healthcare facilities, hence if anybody fell sick, they needed to be shifted to the nearest city or town by covering a distance of more than 100 km from the inaccessible area. The journey is hazardous, particularly for carrying patients to such a distance through waterways (TSRD).

On the other hand, the people of Sundarbans mostly rely on pond water, tube wells and hand pumps due to a lack of fresh, potable water. Ponds are common in every household and they use this water to fulfil their daily needs. As reported by Mr Bagchi, “Tushar Kanjilal observed that the people of Sundarbans were not able to utilise the money of their income properly because it was mostly spent on treating various water-borne diseases, Arsenic poisoning, etc. at that time. So, to remove these health problems and provide basic medical facilities, Tushar Kanjilal initiated a healthcare centre at Rangabelia”, under the Project of Tagore Society for Rural Development in 1980 (Kanjilal et al. 2010, 58).

*d. Role of Tushar Kanjilal in Mangrove & Wildlife Conservation*

Tushar Kanjilal took many initiatives to save the mangroves of Sundarbans. He also authored a book, *Who Killed the Sunderbans?* which dealt with the issues and problems of mangrove forests of the Sundarbans delta. He said that ‘tourism could be a good source of income for Sundarbans but it should be eco-friendly. Pollution (noise, water, air, etc) made through too much gathering of people could harm the ecosystem of Sundarbans (Jalais 2004, 181).

**Role of Bina Kanjilal in Empowering Women of Sundarbans**

Mr. Bagchi stated that not only Tushar Kanjilal but “Mrs. Bina Kanjilal also immensely contributed to the welfare of Sundarbans's people, especially women's empowerment. Bina Kanjilal, fondly known as ‘Didimoni’, taught women various trades like weaving, tailoring, mat-making, poultry, fishery, gardening etc. (Mukhopadhyay 2003, 163). She also used to teach women in the non-formal schools run by Tagore Foundation. She established The Rangabelia Mahila Samity (The Rangabelia Women's Organisation) in 1976. From the very first day, the samiti is running on a cooperative basis, which helped the women of Sundarbans to fight various socioeconomic problems (e.g. lack of education and employment for women, early marriage, dowry, conceiving frequently, and so on)”.

The women of the Samiti produce various clothes i.e. sarees, bags, wraparounds and natural honey (Rangabelia Mahila Industrial Cooperative Society). By selling these products to the locals or visitors of Sundarbans, not only the women working there get benefitted, but it also helps in the economic upliftment of Sundarbans, because they can spend the money for various purposes i.e., shopping, transport, etc, so the money circulates within Sundarbans.

Avijit Bagchi further added, “Bina Kanjilal also focused on recycling and reusing old clothes in the Samiti, which also helps in sustainable development”. She was also a good singer and songwriter, who composed many songs which were unfortunately never published.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

Although, both Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal are presently residing in heavenly abode but, their immense contribution still helps the people of Sundarbans in every possible. The people of Sundarbans are thriving and developing both socially and economically by adopting various sources of income as shown by them. However, the situation was not similar when Mr Kanjilal shifted to Rangabelia with his family and by perceiving the dire situation of the poor people both Mr and Mrs Kanjilal devoted their lives to empower the people of Sundarbans. Many articles, newspaper reports, YouTube videos, etc. discussed the role of Tushar Kanjilal in Sundarbans, who along with the Tagore Society for Rural Development tried to convert the mono-crop lands of Sundarbans and helped the people to adopt alternative sources of income, provided basic healthcare facilities and also tried to conserve the mangrove forests.

But there is a lack of information regarding the role of Mrs Bina Kanjilal in Sundarbans. So, the researchers depend on the primary data collected by interviewing Mr Avijit Bagchi, besides collecting data from secondary sources to establish the narrative story. The researchers found that with the establishment of the Rangabelia Mahila Industrial Cooperative Society, Mrs Bina Kanjilal played a pivotal role in empowering the women of Sundarbans. This organisation not only provides a source of income to the women but also creates awareness among women. “The samiti also organises health camp every 3-4 months to create awareness among school girls regarding their physical health and hygiene”, said Mr Avijit Bagchi. He further added that ‘the samiti also organises vocational training e.g. tailoring, dying, bag making, etc. which helps in self-employment of the distressed women of the Sundarbans village. In the previous year

along with the Ramakrishna Mission, it provided katha stitch training. At present, along with the Wildlife Institute of India, the Samiti is training leather bag production to the women". So, it can be assumed that the role of both Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal in the development and upliftment of the people of Sundarbans is noteworthy.

### Acknowledgement

The researchers are indebted to the interviewee, Mr Avijit Bagchi, the accountant of the Rangabelia Mahila Industrial Cooperative Society for sparing his valuable time and providing significant information about Tushar Kanjilal and Bina Kanjilal.

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## Digital Commodification of Indian Classical Music: A Critical Analysis

Samidha Vedabala

### Abstract

*As digital platforms increasingly dominate the music industry, Indian classical music has experienced significant transformations in how it is produced, distributed, and consumed. This paper analyzes the benefits and challenges of digitization, such as increased global reach and democratization of access, against issues like commercialization and potential erosion of cultural values. Through a comprehensive review of digital trends, artist interviews, and audience perspectives, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how digitization is reshaping the landscape of Indian classical music.*

**Keywords:** Digital Commodification, Indian Classical Music, Cultural Authenticity, Music Industry Transformation

### Introduction

Indian traditional art represents the cultural manifestations that are handed down through the centuries (Satpathy 2015, 279), reflecting the aesthetics, morals, and worldviews of many communities. These artistic disciplines encompass performing arts, visual arts, and oral traditions. Cultural legacy is preserved and passed down from one generation to the next through traditional art forms, many of which have strong origins in the local communities (Dhar 2018, 19). Every art form has a wide variety of styles, approaches, and themes that represent the distinct cultural identities and historical backgrounds of many places and countries.

Thousands of years old Indian Classical music holds a profound significance within the cultural fabric of India and beyond. It is an old and most complex musical traditions in the world (Allen 1998, 23), characterized by its intricate melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, and improvisational techniques (Vidwans 2012, 1). Indian classical music serves as a repository of cultural heritage,

embodying the aesthetic, spiritual, and philosophical traditions of ancient India (Clayton 2008, 49). It draws upon influences including Vedic chants, medieval court music, and folk melodies, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Indian musical tradition (Grimes 2008, 41). The music is spiritual, often being performed as a devotional practice or meditation. It evokes emotional states, transcend mundane concerns, and connect listeners with higher level of consciousness (Altenmuller 2013, 141). *Ragas*, a framework for musical improvisation in Indian classical music, characterized by a specific set of notes, motifs, and rules that evoke particular emotions or atmospheres with their evocative melodies and subtle nuances. It resonates with the variety of nature, the seasons, and the human psyche (Sharma 2007, 153). Indian classical music provides a platform for artistic expression and creativity, allowing musicians to explore improvisation, interpretation, and innovation within the framework of traditional compositions. It encourages a deep engagement with sound, rhythm, and melody, fostering a communion between performer, audience, and the divine. the music inspires artists, composers, and academics from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and it has a tremendous impact on international music genres (Jairazbhoy 1995, 29). Its melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, and aesthetic principles have found resonance in Western classical music, jazz, fusion, and world music, contributing to the enrichment and diversity of the global musical landscape (Vedabala 2016, 5).

The music has evolved over different historical periods, adapting to the opportunities and challenges of each era. One such contemporary evolution is the aggressive integration of digitisation. With the proliferation of online platforms, streaming services, and social media, Indian classical music found new directions for dissemination (Sharma 2022, 4635). Its reaching audiences around the globe with its timeless melodies, intricate rhythms, and spiritual depth. Digital technologies have enabled enthusiasts to access recordings, live concerts and academic resources with unprecedented ease, fostering a global community of aficionados who engage in dialogue, appreciation, and learning. Moreover, Indian classical musicians have embraced digital platforms for innovation, collaboration, and outreach (Frantz 2015, 55), experimenting with fusion genres, virtual concerts, and interactive experiences that push the boundaries of tradition while honoring its rich legacy. However, amidst this digital renaissance, there are also challenges



(Gouzouasis 2011, 3) to navigate, including questions of authenticity, economic sustainability, and cultural preservation. However, Indian classical music now demonstrates its eternal relevance and vitality in the contemporary world by inspiring, enchanting, and resonating with listeners across the globe, all thanks to its dedication to excellence, originality, and diversity.

## **Digital Commodification**

Digital commodification is the process by which goods, services, or experiences that were traditionally physical or non-commercial become digitised and treated as commodities within digital spaces (Fleischer 2017, 147). This involves the transformation of tangible or intangible assets into digital formats that can be bought, sold, traded, or consumed online (Hardy 2000, 218). Digital commodification often involves the application of market principles and commercial strategies (Gans 2003,334), leading to the monetisation and commercialisation of various aspects of culture, creativity, and knowledge. In other way, it involves the conversion of value, whether cultural, artistic, or informational, into digital products or services for consumption, exchange, or profit-making purposes (Fuchs 2013, 257). The commodification of Indian Classical music occurs through various mechanisms and processes, often driven by changes in technology, economics, and cultural dynamics. The transformative impact of digital technologies on the global cultural landscape has accelerated the commodification of the art form. Digitisation, as a central mechanism in this process, has transformed the way the music is created, consumed, and distributed (Moreau 2013, 8). Indian Classical music, previously confined to physical spaces or limited audiences, are now being digitized into various digital formats (Brovig 2023, 15), such as high-resolution images, audio recordings, or virtual reality experiences. This digitisation allows easier reproduction, distribution, and consumption, breaking down geographical barriers and expanding its reach to a wider audience.

When the performances are digitized, they become readily accessible for commercial purposes through online platforms and digital marketplaces. Performers capitalize on this accessibility by

marketing and selling their digitised artworks to audiences far beyond their original geographical boundaries. This globalization opens up new avenues for monetization (Feyre 2020, 2), as artists can now reach a wider audience and plunge into previously untapped markets. Subscription services, virtual events, and online courses offer additional revenue streams for artists and other stakeholders, providing the scope for sustainable income in an increasingly digitised world (Orlandoni 2021, 25). Moreover, the digitization and commercialisation of traditional art forms have caused the avenues of new business models and revenue opportunities. Digital platforms enable artists to bypass traditional intermediaries and provide the direct connection with the audience, eliminating geographical barriers and reducing distribution costs. This direct-to-consumer approach empowers artists to have control over the creative output and financial earnings (Rodriguez 2023, 99), fostering a more equitable and transparent ecosystem for traditional art commerce.

## **Challenges of Digital Commodification**

Along with the scopes and opportunities the digital commodification of Indian Classical Music brings along a set of challenges. Commercialisation potentially dilute or distort the traditional art forms (Born 2000, 26) as they are adapted or packaged to align with commercial benefits rather than preserving the original cultural authenticity. This result in a loss of the intrinsic values and meanings embedded within, diminishing its cultural significance and authenticity. Moreover, monetization pressure compels performers and artists to prioritize commercial success over artistic integrity, leading to a focus on marketability rather than artistic merit (Caves 2000, 29). This pressure to conform to market trends or consumer preferences compromise the creative freedom and authenticity, undermining its cultural value and significance. Furthermore, the digital commodification of traditional art exacerbates existing economic disparities within the artistic community, with larger platforms or corporations dominating the market at the expense of smaller artists or cultural groups. This concentration of power and resources marginalize independent artists, limiting their opportunities for exposure, recognition, and financial sustainability (Sidford

2011, 25). Additionally, the global reach of digital platforms increases the risk of cultural appropriation, where elements of Indian Classical music are appropriated by individuals or entities outside the cultural context without proper acknowledgement or respect for cultural heritage. This exploitation of traditional art for commercial gain perpetuates harmful stereotypes, misrepresentations, and cultural stereotypes, undermining the integrity and authenticity of the old age cultural expressions. Lastly, the digital divide poses a significant barrier to equitable participation in the digital commodification of the art form, with disparities in access to digital technologies and online platforms across regions or communities. This unequal access exacerbates already-existing disparities in the cultural sector by limiting the opportunity for artists and audiences from underprivileged or marginalised regions to participate in the digital marketplace (Ortiz 2019, 30). Commodification also raises complex issues surrounding copyright and intellectual property rights (Coriat 2009, 1) as digital platforms navigate legal frameworks to protect cultural heritage while fostering innovation and creativity. The ability of traditional artists to develop their personal brands, modify their works to suit contemporary preferences, and interact with audiences worldwide is made possible by digital commodification, which guarantees the relevance and vitality of traditional art in the digital era despite these obstacles.

## **Conclusion**

As traditional art forms continue to adapt to the digital age, it is essential for their sustainable integration with digital technologies. Collaborations between technology experts and traditional artists can facilitate the development of user-friendly digital platforms and tools tailored to the unique needs and challenges of traditional art forms. Finding the balance between preservation and commercialisation is crucial to safeguarding the integrity and authenticity of traditional art forms in the digital marketplace. The ability of traditional artists to develop their personal brands, modify their works to suit contemporary preferences, and interact with audiences worldwide is made possible by digital commodification, which guarantees the relevance and vitality of traditional art in the digital era despite these obstacles. Initiatives such as fair-trade certifications,

cultural authenticity labels, and ethical licensing agreements can help protect traditional art from exploitation and appropriation while promoting fair compensation and recognition for artists. Moreover, fostering dialogue and collaboration between traditional artists, cultural institutions, and digital platforms can facilitate transparent and inclusive decision-making processes that prioritize cultural preservation alongside economic sustainability (Nurse 2006, 31).

The policy ramifications and moral issues raised by the internet monetization of traditional art must be addressed by stakeholders and policy makers. To ensure that traditional art is used, represented, and distributed ethically in the digital domain, frameworks, standards, and norms must be developed. In order to ensure that traditional artists and communities are empowered to profit from their cultural expressions in the digital marketplace, policies pertaining to copyright, intellectual property rights, cultural heritage preservation, and cultural diversity should be informed by the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice (Helfer 2006, 994). Moreover, fostering cross-sectoral collaborations and dialogue between government agencies, cultural institutions, civil society organisations, and indigenous communities can promote shared understanding and consensus-building around policy priorities and best practices for the ethical and sustainable integration of traditional art with digital technologies. In conclusion, future directions and recommendations for the digital commodification of traditional art should prioritise strategies for sustainable integration, balancing preservation with commercialization, leveraging digital platforms for education and outreach, and addressing policy implications and ethical considerations. By adopting a holistic and collaborative approach, stakeholders can navigate the complexities of the digital age while ensuring the preservation, promotion, and sustainability of traditional art forms for generations to come.

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## **Effectiveness of Contingency Mapping in Decreasing problem Behaviors in Children with Intellectual Disability with Autism**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to determine how well contingency mapping works to identify problematic behaviors in two autistic children with intellectual disabilities. Utilizing a single-subject research approach, the impact of the intervention was extensively examined. In the first stage of the intervention, verbal contingency was used in place of contingency mapping. Every trial session was conducted in the counseling room next to the secondary classroom of the Lucknow-based special school. Behavioural intervention was evaluated using non-concurrent multiple baseline design across different subject and phases. The outcomes showed that both subjects' target problem behavior could be reduced via contingency mapping, and that this intervention worked better than verbal contingency.*

**Key words:** *Intellectual Disability with Autism, Contingency mapping, verbal contingency*

### **Introduction**

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2021) defines intellectual disability as disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical skills. Problem behavior and skill deficits may result from adaptive behavior impairment. Due to social communication deficiencies, children with autism and intellectual disabilities are more likely to exhibit problematic behaviors (Brown & Mirenda, 2006). Studies have also demonstrated that autism spectrum disorders have exceptional visual ability. To address the problematic behavior of children with autism, a range of visual signals have been applied extensively in the literature. Photographs (West, 2008), visual symbols (Brown & Miranda, 2006), and daily plans (Horner, Car, Strain, Todd & Reed, 2002) are a few examples of these strategies.

One new visual method that has been studied in the literature is contingency mapping. The alternative and current antecedent-behavior-consequence pathways associated with



troublesome behaviors are graphically represented by contingency maps. Developed by Brown & Mirenda (2006), contingency mapping illustrates the diverse routes that result from both the learner's intended and unwanted behavior.

The use of contingency mapping with an autistic child who did not start task performance independently at school and whose difficult behavior was sustained by escaping task demands was examined by Brown and Mirenda (2006). The study showed that contingency mapping was more effective than verbal contingencies in reducing challenging behavior.

In a study made by Vaughn and Horner (1995) with intellectual disability with autism, they found that choices made verbally resulted in a high degree of problem behavior, but choices made using visuals resulted in less problem behavior.

Few studies have reported the effectiveness of contingency mapping in lowering challenging behavior and improving communication skills (Sanguino, D 2014). Further investigations on using this procedure with intellectual disability with autism was recommended.

The purpose of this study was to investigate if contingency mapping can help children with autism and intellectual disabilities who exhibit problematic behavior.

## **Method**

### **Participant**

Two children with intellectual disabilities with autism met following selection criteria: (a) both mild intellectual disabilities and autism as diagnoses. (b) were presented with visual representations; (c) had problem in communicating their demands (d) exhibited problematic behavior during intervention. Both children were newly admitted student of secondary class of special school based at Aliganj, Lucknow.

Subject 1 was 10-year-old male child with IQ of 53. When the subject was six years old, diagnosis was made. Subject was brought to the school one months back with the complaints of not maintaining eye contact, lack of bowel control, not feeding by self. The management plan included training subject -1 in self- help skills, socialization, communication and modification of maladaptive behavior. It was planned to give priority to behavior modification before starting other intervention. A detailed behavioural assessment revealed that the subject

had problem behaviours such as screaming, hitting others, rocking body, which prevented him learning new skills. Subject understands and speak at the two-word level with others.

Subject 2 was 9-year-old girl with IQ of 57. Subject had dual diagnosis of intellectual disability with autism. She was admitted to special school last fortnight. Subject was brought with complaints of rocking her body, laughing at self and dependent on others for most of the tasks of daily living. Subject communicated with two-word level and comprehend other speech.

### **Setting**

The study was carried out at the special school's counseling room, which is next to the secondary classroom. Interventions were provided each working days between 9 to 11 AM. During intervention, the investigator worked individually with the subjects and given them guidance to manage target problem behavior.

### **Target Behaviour**

Challenging behavior of the participants was assessed using BASIC-MR Part B, a behavioural tool developed for management and program planning for children with intellectual disability having problem behaviours. This scale was developed by Peshawaria, R & Venkatesan, S in the year 1992.

Subject 1 exhibited following problem behaviours:

1. Screaming
2. Hitting other
3. Rocking his body

Subject 2 had exhibited following problem behaviours:

1. Getting out of seat
2. Laughing at self
3. Grinding of teeth
4. Talk to self

## 5. Hitting others

Subject 1's screaming and Subject 2's hitting of others were chosen for intervention depending on how serious the problematic behaviors are that were exhibited.

Subject-1 target behavior selected was screaming. Screaming was characterized as any loud, high-pitched yell or scream.

Similarly, subject- 2 target behavior was hitting others. Her behavior of hitting other people was described as each time she hit someone.

Functional analysis of every subject's target behavior was done to get ready for the intervention. On functional analysis, it was gathered that both subjects was fond of music, biscuits and playing with toys. Subject -1 like outing with father on his motorbike. Reinforcers identified were biscuits and social praise for both subjects. Each participant's target behavior and their functions were identified and are presented below in the table.

**Table: 1**  
**Functional analysis of selected target behavior of each subject**

| S.NO | Subject   | Target behaviour | Antecedents   | Consequence   | Function |
|------|-----------|------------------|---|---|----------|
| 1    | Subject 1 | screaming        | When asked to complete task, which he does not like         | Subject was not asked again to do his assignment      | Escape   |
| 2    | Subject 2 | Hitting others   | When asked to complete given task, which she does not like. | Instructor stop asking subject to complete given task | Escape   |

### **Treatment Fidelity**

As suggested by the literature, measures were taken of the procedures needed to implement the intervention so as to assess treatment fidelity. (Fox & Dunlop, 2008). In each intervention phase, treatment fidelity was assessed in the first three sessions. Over 94% of implementation fidelity was reached in each step.

### **Inter-observer Agreement**

For subject 1, target behavior of screaming was observed using interval recording. Screaming frequency was recorded every five minutes.

Similarly, for target behavior of subject 2 interval recording was used. For a period of half an hour, six intervals of five minutes were used to observe the behavior.

In thirty percent of the sessions in every phase, inter-observer agreement percentages were accomplished. A trained special educator registered with Rehabilitation council of India (RCI) independently observed data. Both observers have to agree on a yes or no score to indicate problem behavior. For subject- 1 IOA was 96% and for the subject- 2 IOA was 93%.

### **Research Design**

The intervention was evaluated using a non-concurrent multiple baseline design among subjects. Three stages made up the design: baseline, verbal contingency, and contingency mapping.

### **Procedure**

During baseline, investigator collected data of each subject related to their selected target behavior minimum of three sessions.

Contingency maps were developed for each participant following baseline, taking into account the theoretical functions of their problem behavior. According to the subjects' individual behavior intervention plans, subjects 1 and 2's problem behavior was mostly sustained by running away from their task. After baseline, both participants' contingency maps were created using the assumed functions of their problematic behaviors. A contingency map was created for the escape function and applied to both subjects. The five cells that made up the contingency

map each had an image that represented a section of the map and a text explanation. (Sanguino,D 2014). The 9 x 12 inch laminated paper was used to print the contingency map. The contingency map was displayed on the display board of the therapy room as well.

**Verbal contingency:** In this stage, the investigator expressed orally the consequences linked to the problematic behavior and the substitute behavior (e.g., toys to play with if you do your homework). The repercussions of the problematic behavior were also explained to the subject. (eg. If you do not complete your assignment and scream, then you will not be allowed to play). To provide the child with opportunity to acquire the replacement behavior, the intended path was emphasized.

**Contingency mapping:** Each participant was shown a picture before the contingency mapping was put into practice and vocally stated to make sure they could all follow the picture. In this stage, the researcher initially demonstrated to the participant the contingency map for each task. If the subject is engaged with target problem behavior, investigator ignored this behavior. If the subject participated in problem behavior for longer than two minutes, the investigator used a contingency map to remind them to complete the task or routine. The contingency maps were also placed on the table to ensure that they are visible to them during the discussion.

## Results

**Baseline:** During baseline, subject 1's mean proportion of problem behavior was 83.3% ranged from 83.3% to 100%. Comparably, subject 2's mean proportion of problematic behavior ranged from 83.3% to 100%, with 94.4%.

**Verbal contingency:** During this phase, Subject 1's targeted challenge behavior decreased to a minimum of 50%, with a range of 50% to 66.6%. Similarly, target challenging behavior of subject-2 reduced to minimum of 33.3% with range of 33.3 to 66.6%.

**Contingency mapping:** Subject-1 target challenge behavior decreased to 16.6% in the first three sessions after the contingency mapping phase was implemented, followed by a decrease to 0% in the remaining sessions.

Subject-2 target behavior of hitting others reduced to 33.3% in the first and second sessions, 16.6% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> sessions and finally 0% in the last two sessions. The subject's details

are displayed in the table -2 and visual inspection of the percentage of subject-1&2-problem behavior across experimental phases are displayed in figure 1 &2.

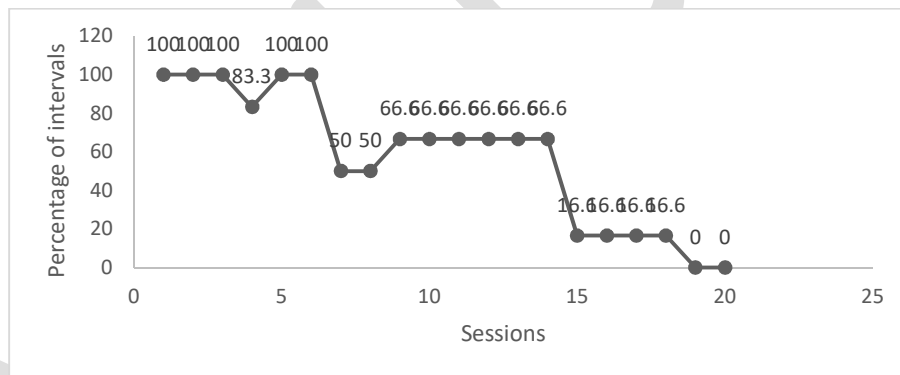
**Table-2**

**Mean percentage of problem behavior during baseline, verbal contingency & contingency mapping**

| Subject | Baseline            | Verbal contingency   | Contingency mapping |
|---------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1       | 97.2%<br>83.3- 100% | 54%<br>50% to 66.6%  | 0.8%<br>0 %- 16.6%  |
| 2       | 94.4%<br>83.3-100%  | 52%<br>33.3 to 66.6% | 1.6%<br>33.3- 0%    |

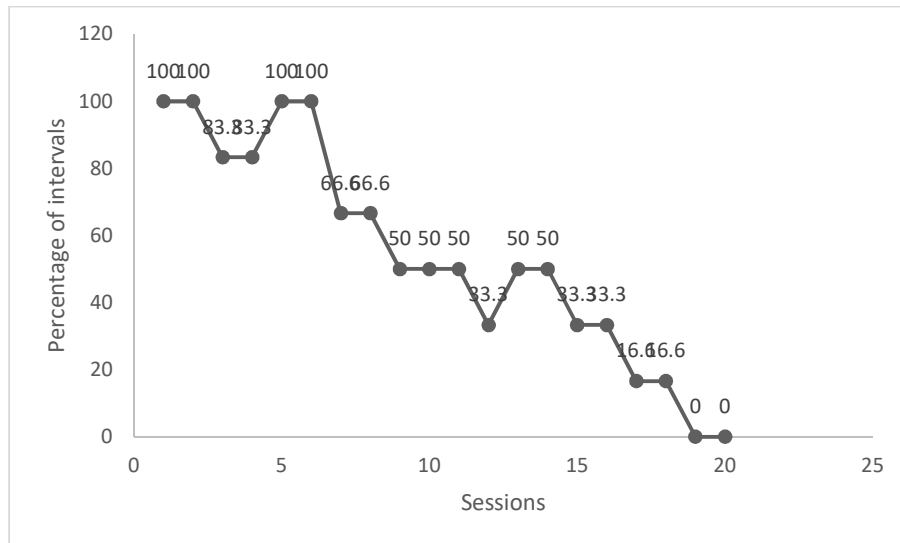
**Figure-1**

**Percentage of subject-1 problem behavior across experimental phases**



**Figure\_2**

**Percentage of subject-2 problem behavior across experimental phases**



## Discussion

According to the primary findings of this study, contingency mapping significantly decreased the goal behaviors of both individuals. Additionally, as demonstrated by the findings of Sanguino, D. (2014) and Brown & Mirenda (2006), contingency mapping intervention proved to be effective than verbal contingency. The study featured few limitations for example, the study employed only two subject for investigation and no data were collected in the home settings.

In summary, contingency mapping works well to reduce problematic behavior in children with autism and intellectual disabilities. Special education teachers and other rehabilitation professionals working with developmental disability can use this strategy to manage their problem behavior.

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## Children with Disabilities in Meghalaya: an overview

“Every child is a different kind of flower that altogether makes this world beautiful garden”

-Unknown

Tipbhalang Marboh and S. Kavitha Maithily

### Abstract

*This paper examines the status and programmes of People with disabilities and Children with disabilities in Meghalaya and India. India has a disabled population of 26.8 million people, or 2.19 per cent of the overall population. In Meghalaya Persons with Disabilities constitute one of the total population and almost 80% of these people live in rural locations. It is the second state in India which has largest population of children with disabilities in the age group of 0 – 6 years as per 2011 census. The government and non-government organization working with persons with disabilities in Meghalaya was also highlighted here and the related studies which are conducted in Meghalaya*

*Keywords: Children with Disabilities, Persons with Disabilities, Meghalaya*

### Introduction

In order to achieve disability-inclusive development, local communities, nations, and the global community can be led by the powerful framework provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Disability is acknowledged as a cross-cutting issue that must be taken into account in the achievement of all of its goals, and it promises to “Leave no one behind”, including members of disadvantaged groups and those with disabilities (WHO, 2019, p.1). An individual classified as a "person with disability" is one who, in addition to other barriers, has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that keeps them from completely and equally participating in society. ((Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, p.6). This article will provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on status of Persons and children with Disabilities both in India and Meghalaya

## **Prevalence of Disability**

One billion individuals, or 15% of the world's population, are disabled, with 110–190 million adults experiencing extremely serious functional impairments (Officer and Shakespear, 2013, p.87). There are 26.8 million differently abled people in India, according to the 2011 Census. This comes to a proportion of 2.21% ((Disabled Persons in India A Statistic Profile 2016,p.2). There are 44317 of them in Meghalaya, or almost 1% of the total population. This include individuals with difficulties related to vision, auditory, speech, movement, cognition, and mental state. This population lives in rural areas to the tune of around 80% ((Meghalaya State Policy for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities 2016, p. 2)

## **Meghalaya State policy for Person with Disabilities**

As stated in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, to advance, defend, and guarantee the full enjoyment of all human rights and essential freedoms for people with disabilities in the State of Meghalaya, where there are also specific intervention like early detection and early intervention where done for children with impairments, early identification is essential to optimal functional results. All children in the community, schools, and Aanganwadi centers should be required to undergo screenings. Better preparation for school readiness would also result from a planned and coordinated transfer of skills to Aanganwadi Workers in early intervention and participation in pre-school programs (Meghalaya State Policy for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (MSPEPD), 2016, pp. 3- 6)

## **State Resource Centre on Disability Affairs in Meghalaya**

The main Mission of SRCDA to act as a link between people with disabilities and the public sector, private sector, and non-profit sector in order to empower people with disabilities in the state. The Vision of SRCDA sees a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in society and is treated equally, with dignity, and with respect for their expressed choices. State Resource Centre on Disability Affairs (SRCDA) along with the State Society for the Implementation of Rehabilitation for the Persons with Disabilities (SSIPRD) was established in the year 2000-2001 in Meghalaya .Through the collaborative works and efforts of SRCDA along with of District Social Welfare Officers, Multipurpose Rehabilitation Workers and Community Based Rehabilitation Workers and other agencies involved, a well-managed network and efficient working model has emerged and developed. This working model has help to create a

functioning disability service center within Meghalaya. And has been able to rehabilitate people with disabilities in the state. Besides providing disabled people with facilities through Rehabilitation Welfare Programmes, the SRCDA of Meghalaya also provides Manpower Training, Public Awareness, Prevention and Early Intervention of Disability, Training of Medical Faculty on providing or issuing of Disability Certificates and Manpower Training of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) workers of North Eastern Region and West. District Resource Centres on Disability Affairs: In order to provide comprehensive services in terms of early detection, prevention, rehabilitation and counselling to persons with disabilities at the grassroots level, 4 (four) District Resource Centres at Shillong, Jowai, Nongstoin and Tura have been set up to cater to the basic needs through assessment camps, distribution/fitment of aids & appliances, training and therapeutic services. The departments under these DRCDA's are: Physiotherapy, Audiology and Speech Therapy, Prosthetics and Orthotics Occupational Therapy, Bengal (State Resource Centre on Disability Affairs, 2024)

### **Non-Government Organization in field of disabilities in Meghalaya**

NGOs are essential in developing and putting participatory democracy into practice. Their contributions to numerous development programs have been substantial. Their reach is much greater and they operate at the local level even in isolated regions (Sohtun, 2016, p.51). The NGOs working for CwDs are mentioned here are 1) Agency for Sustainable Development Initiative mission is to Empowerment of the Marginalised and Powerless. In the direction of "Human Dignity Wholeness, 2) Asha Rehabilitation Centre their aim were Asha School, Shillong" in order to guarantee that the institution fulfils its ultimate goals of successfully rehabilitating children with disabilities from all echelons of the armed forces, paramilitary forces, civil defence employees, and Shillong residents, 3) Dwar Jingkyrmen, Stonyland have a very limited its services to young people with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and multiple disabilities. More recently, it added a unit for children with mental retardation, 4) Ferrando Speech and Hearing Centre is a Speech and Hearing Centre works to empower people with hearing loss via early intervention, education, rehabilitation, and workforce development and 5) Bethany society, Lady Veronica Lane this society has a special goal where they opt a programme is to build a network of community-based rehabilitation specialists, or Divyang Mitras, who can collaborate with ASHA and Anganwadi workers to address cross-disability issues and enable the mainstreaming of individuals with disabilities into society (Source: Office of the State Commissioner for Person with disabilities, 2024)

### **Related studies on Children with Disabilities in Meghalaya**

Research studies on children with Disabilities are vitally importance in formulating policies and programme for them actually very limited studies are carried out in Meghalaya related to CwDs, few studies are presented here:

Meghalaya has a high incidence of malnutrition of children 0-5years old, and the prevalence of stunting grew from 44% in 2015–2016 to 47% in 2019–2020 (the national average is 36%). Anaemia prevalence among children and pregnant women is currently at 45% (national average: 67% for children and 52% for pregnant women), which is concerning because it has a negative impact on outcomes related to birth, child development, and mortality (Early Childhood Development Project in Meghalaya, 2022 , p.5).

In the study “Teachers Training for Differently- Abled Students in Higher Education (With Special Reference to Shillong, East-Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya, India)” find out amongst the responses gathered from all 45 teachers, it was discovered that none of them had ever participated in or encountered this type of teacher training for students with disabilities. This indicates that no seminars, conferences, or courses have been held to date to educate teachers about differently abled pupils at the higher level. None of the instructors had encountered this kind of teacher preparation for students with disabilities in higher education. The investigator also learnt from the data that no groups had put together this kind of program. Additionally, it was discovered that there are no facilities for teachers to obtain formal training on how to work with students who have special needs, so none of the teachers have at the higher level (Lyngdoh, 2019, p. 17 )

The study on “Information Needs and Information Seeking Behavior of Teachers of Special Education in Shillong, India” conducted in three schools in Shillong Jyoti Sroat, Dwar Jingkyrmen, and School& Centre for Hearing Handicapped children with 30 respondents of the teachers with questionnaire. The study found that 92% of the respondents felt alone in their roles as instructors of students with disabilities. A majority of those answered work as classroom teachers, primarily working with students who have learning disabilities and mental impairments (Laloo, 2013, p.53)

### **Conclusion**

India has increased its focus on disability employment, education, health status and National Institute working on disability, while research specific programme are carrying at the national level but yet specified for Persons and Children with Disabilities in rural and remote areas not address. Meghalaya be a second

higher rate of Children with Disabilities age of 0-6 years so more children focus programme to be plans, due to geographical condition it hard to reach the tribe living in remote areas, more research on CwDs need to conducted in Meghalaya to formulate innovative strategies in address the challenges PwDs in remote area

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# **Book Review**

## Book Review

*N. Sukumar. Caste Discrimination and Exclusion in Indian Universities: A Critical Reflection. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2023, 185 pp. ISBN: 978-1-003-09529-1 (Hardcover), DOI:10.4324/9781003095293*

**Anurag Kumar**

With the modernisation and westernisation of Indian society, there persists a general feeling that social institutions like educational institutions are relatively free from traditional practices like caste discrimination, as now, they are governed by educated people who do not believe in casteism. However, N. Sukumar, in his book, described how caste discrimination and exclusion are taking place in modern educational institutions. He marked this argument by conducting an empirical study based on the research of interviews of more than 600 students of scheduled caste, including both males and females. The research includes primary and secondary data based on a quantitative and qualitative method, including narratives and case studies reflecting that structural inequalities persist in the Indian higher education system. The study seeks to locate caste discrimination in multiple spaces like classrooms, hostels, laboratories and shared spaces for administration and cultural activities. The book reflects upon academia as an unequal space where the students from marginalised sections, particularly Dalits (Schedule caste), struggle for their survival and try to make their life chances.

The author points out the forms of discrimination, exclusion and prejudice faced by Dalit students. The book describes how caste identity determines the relations between the student and supervisor, administration, and peer groups. The book also describes caste-plaining against Dalits, leading to their rejection in the interview, getting low marks, refusal/delay in availing of the fellowship, etc. The author has given empirical evidence to support his argument. The authors also deal with other important aspects like the issue of merit, reservation policy, low proportion of SC students and faculties, etc, which systematically hinder the development of Dalit students. The book provides interesting insights into the epistemic injustice done to Dalit students, where they lacked the vocabulary to contextualise



within educational spaces. The author further emphasises how discrimination affects the academic performance of Dalit students, which also brings low esteem and low life chances. He also addressed the question of the accessibility of Dalits in universities and how NEP 2020 do not cater for the need of Dalit students.

The book examines the role of the educational institution in fostering an inclusive environment in the campus. The author debates the idea of a university as an unequal space where Dalit students face discrimination and exclusion on the basis of their caste identity. The author also discusses the ghettoization of Dalits, leading to their social exclusion on campus. The author uses different theoretical approaches to describe this structural discrimination leading to structural violence. He deconstructs the idea of merit, which has become the structural tool to humiliate Dalit students. He uses the work of Kancha Ilaiah to argue how the notion of merit has been built upon a false narrative which is being used to prevent their hegemony from getting diluted. He described it as “social smuggling” (pg. 72). The author also discusses the notion of gatekeepers in the academia who take refuge in the idea of merit to prevent their hegemony from being diluted (pg.17). The book also critically analyses the role of faculties and administration, which often leads to their dropout, rejection, failure and refusal in availing the fellowship from the institute. The author describes the struggles and stigma of their daily lived experiences through empirical data.

The book covers six chapters describing Dalit students' experiences in Indian universities. The first few chapters highlight the social dynamics of the educational system, emphasising that academia functions inside a network of connections involving gender, class and caste rather than existing in a vacuum. The fourth chapter features sixteen narratives from Dalit students. The sample includes both elite Dalits and first-generation students coming from working-class families. Collectively, they depict the tale of oppression and alienation brought by their low caste.

In the second last chapter, the author delves into an important issue revolving around caste discrimination and exclusion in educational institutions: the increasing trend of the suicide of

Dalit students. The author tries to address the issue from a subaltern perspective, which is often considered a minor problem by the administration dominated by the upper caste. The concluding chapter talks about the measures to address caste discrimination on campus and recent policies like NEP 2020 and the state's lacklustre response to address the elephant in the room, which is caste discrimination in Indian universities.

Chapter 1 describes educational apartheid in India, where lower caste and women were denied access to education and monopolised by some privileged groups. Even today, the lower caste is challenged by the dominant paradigm of knowledge dissemination. The chapter provides an understanding of different theoretical frameworks like the “Forms of capital” of Bourdieu, the “Ideological State Apparatus” of Althusser, the “Caste of Meritocracy” of Ajantha Subramaniam etc, to understand the caste as an instrumental factor of defining the social construction of reality. The author discussed the exclusion manifesting in higher education and the lives of the excluded students, mostly Dalits. He takes the references of their other empirical work to augment/supplement his argument further.

Chapter 2 discusses the idea of a university, where the author talks about the essential features of universities, any tempering to the features of it dismantles the concept of a university. The chapter includes various data from secondary sources like AISHE, RTI which are used to analyse the caste hierarchies in higher education. The author further analysed the implication of government schemes like Savitri Bai Phule Shiksha Madad Yojna, Beti Bachao Beti Pado Yojna, etc, which had a positive impact on the gross enrolment ratio. However, the author noted that there has been a decline in the ratio of Dalits in higher education. The tardy implementation of the reservation policy in all the states and the privatisation of education are a few of the reasons that the author concluded about the dismissal condition of Dalits in higher education.

Chapter 3 is a crucial chapter of the book, highlighting the structural hierarchies leading to discrimination in higher education. The author describes the epistemic injustice faced by Dalit students in different spaces like a classroom, hostel, interaction with the faculty, and

bureaucratic semiotics in the university administration. The author argued on how the surname plays a critical role in the inclusion or exclusion of the students. He noted that most of the time, discrimination and humiliation are very subtle and sophisticated. The microaggression theory in the works of Bharat Rathod views a similar pattern of discrimination. When it comes to the idea of merit, the author describes how the idea of meritocracy has become another structural tool to humiliate Dalits students. The author cites Kancha Ilaiah's works on meritocracy to dismantle the notion of merit, which has been built upon the cultural capital of the upper caste. Sukumar argues that throughout the life of Dalits, they have to bear the cross of merit; even if they get successful in their chosen field, it is always assumed that “quotas” have helped them to achieve their socio-economic mobility (pg.71). The empirical research conducted by the author also revealed the same.

Chapter 4 describes the social history of Indian academia and illustrates the caste-plaining and institutionalised casteism in Indian universities. He discussed how the issue of merit always hangs on Dalits like Damocles sword. To illustrate, the author provides empirical evidence through his field studies with the case studies. The chapters include 12 case studies based on primary work and 4 case studies based on secondary sources. These caste studies describe the discrimination, prejudice and exclusion faced by Dalit students in Indian universities in multiple spaces.

In Chapter 5, the author debates the social semantics of Dalit students' suicide. In this chapter, the author investigates the discriminatory practices which have led to a rise in the suicide of Dalit students. The author discusses the caste and social anomie present on the campus, which has become a major reason for the increasing suicide of Dalit students. The author has explained the sociological dynamics of suicide by using the theoretical tool of Emile Durkheim, P.H Collins. The chapter further discusses the reasons for suicide by Dalit students, such as hostile regulation, insults, academic and social stigmatisation, etc. Here, the author has discussed the cases of Dalit scholars like Payal Tadvi, Rohit Vemula, etc, who died by suicide because of institutional casteism.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter of the book, which he calls it as social cosmology of merit and pervasive injustices. The author draws the critique of merit and injustice prevalent in the institution, highlighting the administration's indifference in dealing with the plight of Dalit students. This is supported by the empirical data provided by the author regarding the SC/ST cell, the administration's attitude to resolving the grievances and the narratives of Dalit students' exclusion in the universities. He also discusses the NEP 2020 and its implication on Dalit students, which he described it as an exclusion/exit policy. In the last part, the author discusses the measures to address discrimination on campus and talks about cultivating radical empathy to address the issue.

The work is very relevant to understand the socio-psycho trauma faced by Dalit students in Indian higher education. The book contributes to the discourse on discrimination in higher education, which is often overlooked or neglected as a rare event. The author's work enables the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of caste discrimination in various spaces of educational institutes. It would also help the policymakers and university administration to understand the plight of Dalit students and to rectify their measures in the right direction.

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**Maria Ravlik, *The Fight against Human Trafficking: Drivers and Spoilers* (Palgrave Pivot, First Edition, 2020), 224 pages**

**Anwesha Hazarika**

Human Trafficking is a global crime purportedly rising in today's time after the world has turned into a global village. The unlawful act of recruitment, transfer and harboring of people trans-nationally or within a nation through force, fraud or deception for exploitation of the trafficked, physically, mentally, psychologically, sexually and emotionally for profit, covers the broader phenomenon of Human Trafficking (Louis 2010, p. 112). Ravlik's work is a researched output regarding the nexus of human trafficking happening in the world, anti-trafficking approaches taken by different states and the global drivers functioning behind reinforcing the crime relentlessly. Her motive is to make the readers holistically connect to the cause-effect relation between Human Trafficking and Human Rights. A very significant area of study in the Chapter 1, of Introduction, ponders upon how Trafficking is perceived in the society and the suitable legislation to clarify the relation between the existing Anti-Trafficking laws and its implementation (Ravlik 2020, pp. 5-6). Similarly, she unfolded the nexus of trafficking constituting of three elements in the subsequent Chapter 2, titled, 'Triangulated Nexus and Anti-Trafficking Enforcement', as 'the organized crime', the pivot of the pyramid, engulfed by corruption and violation of Human Rights as both the corners of it.

The author has enunciated an argument regarding decriminalization of prostitution as a combating approach towards Human Trafficking by adopting a cross-national theoretical framework. Since domestic laws are unequal in societies, therefore, as per her research, she has challenged the laws that criminalizes prostitution (pp-26-29). She came up with an interesting analysis with example

in such a context, in Chapter 3, 'Measuring Anti-Trafficking Enforcement', stating that criminalization of prostitution, make men, women and children more vulnerable towards getting trafficked as they would have to undergo through several stages of illegal activities in the hands of the traffickers, be it, abduction, kidnapping and drugging. However, if prostitution is legalized, then according to her researched data, Trafficking rate would recede a bit (Pp-40-44). She says, "If Prostitution market is transparent, the better is the Anti-Trafficking Enforcement mechanism". The author, has cited the example from the context of the European countries, which are strict in their legislation against trafficking, are witness of maximum of 67% of trafficking cases which could be across and within the nations. Therefore, she emphasized in her book, regarding the legal differences in global anti-trafficking enforcement, which has ranked the countries of the world as reported by the US Department of the State, as Tier, those that complies with the Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA's) standard, Tier 2 as those countries making consistent efforts although not being fully compliant and Tier 3 as those that are deficit in both the aspects. Another significant illustration that Ravlik undertook in her work through Chapter 4, 'Identifying the Global Drivers' and Chapter 5, 'Exploring Differences Between Countries', are identifying the global drivers which constraints or act as a barrier in the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking measures mostly, as supported by her empirical data worldwide. Country-level inequality, unwillingness to follow the standards of the international laws, the lack of political culture, state capacity and liberal democracy, high demand of vulnerable people and slacken prostitution laws leads to more trafficking for sexual exploitation (Pp-51-67). Moreover, the author, has also addressed a frequent factor for human trafficking, as the wars for/by the military personnel near the base camps and another cause she mentioned is the imbalance sex ratio, for which women and girl child are targeted by the traffickers, mainly in the South Asian and South-East Asian nations (Pp 92-98).

As a reader of her illustrious non –fiction piece, Ravlik's work could be a reference to the policy makers and the NGOs, for locating the traffickers, preventing trafficking and helping the victims

of the crime. Chapter 6, 'Proxying a Public Policy', discusses means to combat Trafficking, as she proposes three depending factors- the state capacity, political culture and gender status. She has referred for an uniform international anti-trafficking enforcement (Pp-105-108). The last two Chapters 7, titled 'Explaining Tolerance of Violence' and in the concluding Chapter 8, the author adopts a cross-sectional, longitudinal and multilateral methodology, for discussing plausible explanations of what creates national environment that are more or less hostile to the government Anti-Trafficking efforts. She explained the long term impacts of trafficking on Human Rights and the necessary probable state responses so far and the futuristic approaches of the state stakeholders for mitigating the crime from the society (pp-114-138).

Maria Ravlik, in the book, has shed light on some of a complex issue of human trafficking, presenting a comprehensive analysis of the drivers and spoilers involved in the heinous crime. But if analyzed deeply, her work has a minimal scholarly vigor. Saying so, the author lagged behind in undertaking/developing a theory for anti-trafficking enforcement. Moreover, the lack of in-depth case specific evidences to support the context and excessive use of technical jargon and academic language, have not eased in reaching out to a wide range of heterogeneous readers. As a result, it would not be able to achieve its intended goal of raising awareness and promoting understanding of the phenomenon of Human Trafficking for those readers who are not well versed with the phenomenon. Another gap, which the author could have pondered upon is in the literature examining the legal response to trafficking problem amongst the victims of the country of origin and the countries of destination. In sensitive issues like trafficking, survey data or public opinion, increases the authenticity of it, but Ravlik's work has a meager reference of statistics in substantiating her viewpoints. The author often relied on anecdotal evidences and personal opinions, presenting a biased perspective rather than providing a balanced and nuanced understanding of the subject. Another notable drawback of the book is its limited scope. Ravlik predominantly focuses on drivers and spoilers of human trafficking without delving into the broader socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that contribute to this global issue.

Although the volume has a few shortfalls, but it offers some valuable insights into the topic. This account highlights the human cost of human trafficking, with enormous distinctive arguments made between prostitution and trafficking and prostitution and violence. The most striking yet uncommon content lies towards the end chapters where the author herself, has mentioned regarding the shortcomings of the book and the required aspects that needed to be covered with due respect to the topic.

Concludingly, Maria Ravik's book is undoubtedly a thought-provoking issue and is a vital literature on human trafficking. Her efforts reflected in the content bears an awareness mechanism and call for action from the public to be sensitive towards the crime and be alert for reportage and combating. This book deserves a three star out of five star, after being reviewed and it could be referred to or would be beneficial to the researchers and the state stakeholders, to study deeply the prospects leading to Trafficking and advance the mitigating mechanism of the heinous crime.

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**Roluahpuia; Nationalism in the Vernacular: States, Tribes, and the Politics of Peace  
in Northeast India, Cambridge University Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-009-33954-4**

**Hmingthanzuali**

The diverse ethnic tribes in Northeast India have experienced nationalist movements since India's independence. Each community has expressed dissatisfaction with the Indian nation-state, seeking self-determination and complete secession from India. Consequently, there is a wealth of literature on nationalism of various ethnic groups in the history of Northeast India. Throughout the last century, the histories of nationalism in the region primarily focused on an 'elite-centric' perspective, neglecting the autonomous role played by ordinary people. In recent decades, scholars from diverse disciplines have shown significant interest in postcolonial discourse, prompting them to critically engage with the question of marginality in historical literature. They have made an attempt 'to allow the 'people' finally to speak within the jealous pages of this elite historiography,' (Gandhi: 1998, 2) and are looking for new methodologies that would enable them to listen to voices from below. In this context, Roluahpuia, the author of *Nationalism in the Vernacular* utilizes orality as the primary source of information, in addition to archival records including government and media reports to position the Mizo people as active agents in asserting their rights to imagine and define the nation in their own terms. The author explores the relationship between the idea of vernacularization of nationalism and the Mizo people sense of self across various regions of Northeast India including Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura- the states where language (Lusei) became one of the most significant markers of the Mizos' ethnic consciousness.

The oral expressions of nationalism are examined through different genres of *hla* (songs) such as *party hla*, *hnam hla* and *rambuai hla*, and through the recovery of oral narratives from silenced voices that were suppressed by official records. The author also refers to the utilization of vernacular expressions such as *ram leh hnam* (*ram*- land or country and *hnam*- tribe, clan, nation) and *zalenna* (freedom) by the political leaders to localize the nationalist sentiments in a language that could be comprehended by all communities in the region. (p.3 &7) He asserts that *zalenna* emerges as the fundamental ideological foundation and political driving force of the Mizo nationalist movement.

Focusing on the mainstream Indian nation-state's agenda regarding the questions of marginalization and the political movement for autonomy among various tribes in India, the book starts by addressing the issue of 'tribal question' in post-colonial context. For the author, the national question in India is not just an issue of national integration, but rather a matter of inclusion. To examine the dynamics of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' in the northeast region, he refers to the historical exclusion of India's northeast that rendered the region being 'unknown' to the rest of the country. In order to pursue their agenda of nationalist politics, the BJP has recently made an effort of integrating the history of Northeast India into the mainstream narrative by including various tribal heroes as 'Indian national freedom fighters' within official national history. An abrupt response, however, emerged from the Mizos against the inclusion of Khuangchera, a Mizo hero, in the list. For the Mizos, Khuangchera had resisted and died for the Mizos, not for Indians, during the Mizo resistance against the incursion of the British in Mizo *ram* (the present state of Mizoram). The case of Khuangchera, the author contends, is a case of *ram leh hnam* that further reinforces the Mizos' *hnam* consciousness (p.46) to maintain their distinct identity from *vai* or (non-Mizo particularly people from mainland India) rather than being integrated into the larger Indian society.

In the subsequent chapters, the author explores the events that contributed to the development of Mizo *hnam* consciousness and examines the Mizos' evolving sense of *ram leh hnam* throughout Mizo political history. In doing so, chapter 3 of the book examines political mobilization carried out by the Mizo Union Party (MU), the first political party in Mizoram, in their resistance against colonial policy of 'exclusion' between the year 1946 and 1951. The Mizo people, according to him, emerged as active agents, who articulated and asserted their aspirations themselves in their challenges to colonial authority and 'in claiming their rights through the demand for recognition of Mizo *hnam* and autonomy in independent India' (pp. 49, 50) The movement was a distinct one that instilled *hnam* consciousness among the Mizos with the idea of *ram* embedded within it. The idea of nationalism was vernacularised in the movement through the question of inclusion and exclusion, which was manifested by resistance against the uses of *Lusei* or Lushai (colonial term) to identify the Mizo people and territories. Since the clan name *Lusei* used by the colonizers was considered exclusive, representing only a few clans, it was proposed to adopt the term 'Mizo' as a shared identity for all Mizo tribes residing in various territories (P. 76). Nevertheless, the Duhlian language, the language of the Lusei tribe, was adopted and, as the author stated, 'remained the essential marker for defining Mizo identity' (p.74). Significantly, *hla* (song) have been employed as a medium to articulate a

political sentiment and perspectives of the time within this movement. It was utilized not only to mobilize the people and foster a shared sense of identity but also to disseminate political ideas that reached village boundaries and national borders.

Putting aside the efforts contributed by educated party leaders, the contributions of Non-MNF (Mizo Nationalist Front) members, song composers and ordinary Mizo, in the construction and dissemination of the idea of a Mizo *hnam* are examined in chapter 4. Through songs, nationalist concepts were conveyed in a way that was relatable and attractive to the general public. Roluahpuia discusses widely recognised *hnam hla* composed by Rokunga and Laltanpuia that gained immense popularity in inspiring people's longing for their *zalen* and their aspiration for the *ram leh hnam*, which he describes as expressions of 'vernacular nationalism.' In terms of reclaiming people's agency, the author has incorporated song composers and the ordinary people into the historical narratives of the construction of national idea. This is because, as the author agrees with the words of Hobsbawm stated on page 83, 'nationalism cannot be understood unless it is also analyzed from below...and interest of the ordinary people. Building on the works of Anderson's 'Imagined communities' and David Zou's 'A Historical Study of "Zo" Struggle', the author looks at how elite intellectual leaders disseminated their imagination of Mizo nationality and defined their struggle for *zalen* through printed texts. Meanwhile, for the volunteers and armies involved in the Mizo national movement, the struggle remained focusing on *zalen*, free from any kind of domination and exploitation under the mainstream nation-state.

The independent movement of the MNF affected the entire population in Mizoram in diverse ways as the result of counter insurgency strategy employed, which involved aerial attack, village groupings, and curfews and others. Consequently, the region entered 'a period of unreconflict, aptly termed by the Mizos as *Rambuai*. Despite the portrayal of the Mizo public as mere 'silent sufferers', this counter-insurgency approach in turn that led to diverse forms of resistance emerging within the Mizo community. Drawing on the idea of survivance defined by Vizenor, the resilience of the Mizo public in the face of violence and terror are examined in chapter 5. Specifically, the author focuses on the emergence of a new genre of song, known as *Rambuai hla*, which allowed the Mizo people to give voice to their own experiences and define their own condition during the times of conflict, on their own terms. In addition to examining songs, oral

narratives are also explored to uncover people's agency in their struggle for *zalenna*, as well as in their responses to the various forms of violence. While the narrative of violence and victimhood is the most discussed topic with women, being seen as the primary victims, in the dominant master narratives of the MNF movement, women's agency (both rebels and civilians) has been reclaimed through oral narratives in the chapter 4 and 5. (pp. 108&122) In his attempt of the recovery of peoples' voices, the author asserts that memories and violent experiences of the people were overshadowed by the peace accord and, their voices were silenced by the post-conflict binary narratives of the MNF rebel writers and the mainstream nation-state. Although the literature of the Mizo Nationalist movement had been dominated by binary narratives of conflict and peace, emerging scholars and writers have made a significant effort to retrieve the repressed memories and memoirs of both the MNF members and the general public. The focus on 'peoples' history' is now an emerging trend among the writings on Mizo nationalism with *Nationalism in the Vernacular* being an example of this approach to capturing the historical perspectives of the common people.

In short, *Nationalism in the Vernacular* presents a fresh outlook on the study of nationalism in the Mizo community, which has been a defining aspect of Mizo history. It sheds light on the significance of comprehending the expression of nationalism through vernacular mediums such as regional idioms, cultural practices, and songs, and proposes new insights and approaches to studying 'new' history. The book offers a nuanced and intricate understanding of nationalism in the Mizo community, highlighting its local origins and dynamic nature. By giving prominence to ordinary narratives and emotional connections to the nationalist movement, it makes a valuable contribution to the comprehension of nationalism.

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